

How To Train Your Dragon 2: Love, Peace, and Power

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Summary: Hiccup and Toothless are happy on Berk. But three months after the Dragon Battle, tidings of war and woe begin to echo across the island. A bloodthirsty girl comes to live on Berk - but her presence spells misery for everyone. More info inside. R&R please

1. Prologue

****Further info on this story:****

****Violence:** This is "T," but this is about VIKINGS. They had a rough culture.**

****There is violence in the later chapters** " Hiccup gets knocked around pretty badly. If you've ever read an Eragon book, then I think that's something like what I'm dealing with. Maybe without the most graphic bits of an Eragon book, though. It's a war story, and there's fighting, but I don't think I get TOO detailed.**

****Romance:** I DON'T have any explicit stuff in here, I don't write that and I don't read it, but there is some kissing. Rather on the passionate side, if you leave it up to my imagination!"

****Over all,** I'd rate this something like PG-13. I HOPE you're still reading, that I didn't scare you off! I just felt the need to put that further info up there, for safety's sake.**

****The chapter lengths will be erratic,** some long, some short. This one's really short. I swear the next one's longer.**

****One last note:** I appreciate reviews! Criticism I also appreciate.**

****And if you are still reading,** I thank you profoundly and present the story.**

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><p>How to Train Your Dragon 2:<p>

Toothless' Quest for Love, Hiccup's Quest for Peace, and Kenna's Quest for Power

* * *

><p>As told by Toothless<p>

Prologue

I tensed. Hiccup's eyelid had just flickered. Maybe it was my imagination, but - no. His eyes opened, displaying the deep green of his irises, and a flame of joy kindled in my heart. The waiting was over.

Waiting is a pain in the tail. We had all discovered that. Every last Viking on the island of Berk knew it too well, after days and days doing nothing but waiting.

Okay, we did a few other things besides wait. We rebuilt most of the village to accommodate dragons. The men built ships and the women wove sails and dyed them with all the colours of the rainbow, in honour of dragons.

The problem is, for most of these jobs, you sort of need hands.

When all you're doing is waiting, all you need is eyes, eyes to watch.

I sat by Hiccup's bed, as I had been doing all week. Guess what I was doing. Waiting.

But no longer! He was awake, awake and alive!

I put my scaly nose on his face, feeling the soft skin, greeting him, welcoming him home, silently rejoicing.

He sat up, and I couldn't contain my excitement anymore. I jumped around the room, revelling in my best friend's awakening.

This joy would never end, I was sure of it. It was too full, too complete, too amazing.

If only I had been right.

2. Chapter 1

****Chapter 1****

It was one of those days where you can't see the sky. Layers of dull grey clouds spread across the heavens. Shafts of light penetrated

through the mass occasionally, lighting up the whitecaps on the green-black sea. Wind howled for miles over the watery expanse, and, reaching an island, tore at the sails of the spray-beaten ships that rocked beside slippery piers. The tall flaxen grasses that covered the island bent under the force of the gale, and the trees groaned as the last brown leaves were torn from their groping twigs.

Rain had beaten the island during the long hours of the arctic night. It darkened the wooden buildings that huddled together against the tempest, until the whole world seemed to blur together into a puddle of grey and black and murky brown.

A boy knelt in the mud of the streets that wove in and out of the village, head down, hands sprinkled with tiny flecks of dirt. His white fingers were holding the stem of a leaf tightly. The leaf was red, bright red, a speck of colour in the dreary day, and against the black of the world, it shone. Its surface was shot through with veins and raindrops ran down it, dripping down the stalk and onto the boy's fingers.

The boy bent his head down even more, forest green eyes alight with pleasure. It was just a leaf, but to him, it was a work of art, a masterpiece. Everything was a masterpiece, to that boy.

He held the leaf up to his nose, smelling the earthy, fresh scent rising from its damp surface. He closed his eyes, and smiled. A sweet smile.

The wind gusted again, and the boy let the leaf go and watched it tumble away through the narrow streets. The wind ruffled his thick brownish-red hair and tugged at his green tunic. He put his hand up and felt the draft. A drop of rain hit the middle of his palm.

"Come on," he said, his voice a little too old for his body. "Let's get inside, it's starting to rain."

He started to walk up the sloping road, limping a little.

His name was Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, but for a boy with such a long name, he wasn't much to look at in terms of appearance. You had to look inside Hiccup to see what made him unique.

Behind him, a patch of night mimicked him, starting to move up the street. If you glanced at it, you might think that it was a shadow, but if you looked close enough, you might catch the gleam of teeth or the swish of a tail, and realize that it was me â€" Hiccup's constant companion. And when I came into the light, you would be able to tell that I was not a shadow at all, but a dragon, black as pitch, with eyes like emeralds.

I followed Hiccup's uneven gait to the largest building in the village, the Great Hall. Rain was now beating down on the roof, and Hiccup hurriedly limped inside.

He stopped when he saw who was there, then continued, staying close to the wall, trying not to distract the assembly of adults who were gathered in the room.

A girl with long yellow hair who was sitting in the corner of the room beckoned slightly to Hiccup.

Hiccup nodded, and started towards her. He walked quietly for a boy who only has one foot, but not as quietly as he had been able to before, before his soft, silent left foot had been burned off in an accident and replaced by two metal pieces that slid together not exactly inaudibly.

But Hiccup managed to reach the girl with only one adult looking up, a huge man with an enormous beard that cascaded down his chest like a broad red waterfall " Stoick the Vast, chief of Berk, Hiccup's father.

The chief gave no sign that he had seen Hiccup enter, but continued listening to the assembly's talk.

Hiccup bit his lip and sat down beside the girl. Both the chief and he knew that children weren't really supposed to eavesdrop on the adults.

I followed Hiccup noiselessly, and settled beside him, ears already perked up, listening to every word the assembled men and women said.

"What's up?" Hiccup whispered to the girl.

"Thornburg." The word was low and menacing. "The Thornburgians are declaring war."

"War?"

The girl nodded without taking her eyes off the chief.

"Hey, Astrid?" Hiccup asked the girl.

She nodded again.

"Why on earth do they want war?"

"The dragons."

Hiccup took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "The dragons," he repeated.

Astrid nodded again.

"If this war is set in action and anyone dies, it'll be my fault!" He hissed into her ear.

"We're together on this, Hiccup. It won't be your fault."

Hiccup scowled, apparently not satisfied.

Six months ago, if Astrid had said, 'We're together on this,' to him, he would've been over the moon, because Hiccup loved her. Six months ago, she hadn't been interested in any of the boys on the island, yet she had managed to have them all chasing after her. Six months ago, she hadn't liked any of them, least of all Hiccup.

But the world had changed drastically in those six months.

Six months ago, the Vikings of Berk had hated dragons and murdered them without a second thought. They had been the pests of the village, scum to be gotten rid of however possible. To kill a dragon was to earn fame and glory.

Hiccup had longed to take a dragon's life. How different the world had been. He had aimed at a Night Fury in the darkness, and brought the dragon down.

He had gone to look for it in the woods, to finish it, to slaughter it, to put it to death. To cut out its heart and bring it back to his father.

He had found it. He had found me.

He had raised his knife.

But he hadn't brought it down.

He knew how much trouble he could get in for letting me go. But he had still cut my ropes.

He had come back, again and again, and found out that he had torn off my tailwing when he had shot me, and thus, I could not fly or hunt. He had brought me food, and he had made me a new tailwing, so that he and I could fly together.

Then Astrid had found us in the woods. She had started to run back to the village, to tell the chief that his son was a traitor, and that in the woods, grounded and helpless, was a dragon of the species no one had ever killed. To tell him that there was a Night Fury there.

But I had caught her up in my claws, and carried her to the top of a tall pine. There, Hiccup had convinced her to go on a ride with him, and she had been transformed, and had given up her prejudice and dragon-loathing. And she had stood by him when he had revealed his feelings to the village, and stood by him in the battle against the evil sea dragon.

So, 'We're together on this,' wasn't as drastic a thing for her to say now as 'Thornburg is declaring war on us.'

We listened to the adults talking for a long time. Most of it was rubbish, and the rest we hardly understood, but we learned enough to know that the threat of war was serious.

Once in a while, I stole a glance at Hiccup and Astrid. Hiccup's hand was in hers. Over the six months I had spent among humans, I had learned a few of their customs, but this one defeated me. What, exactly, was the point of holding hands? What did it mean?

I turned my attention back to the grownups.

After about an hour, the assembled adults started to disperse, muttering amongst themselves.

Astrid stood. "You'll tell me what happens, right?"

"Yeah. If he tells me something important, I'll pass it on. That's

what are friends for, right?"

She flashed him a smile, then slipped out of the door.

Finally, the only people left in the room were Hiccup and Stoick.

Hiccup didn't look up at his father, but kept his eyes on the ground, nervously fiddling with the edge of his coat.

"Son."

The word reverberated through the empty hall, and Hiccup stopped playing with his coat and looked up at his father.

"Yes."

Stoick shook his head. "You know you're not supposed to be in here when I'm meeting with my commanders."

Hiccup said nothing.

Stoick sighed. "Why did you come in?"

"I have to know what's going on. It's important. I'm your heir, if we're getting involved in war, then I have to know."

Stoick sighed. "So, what do you think?"

"What?"

"We're meeting with the Thornburgian chief in person, on a tiny island some miles over the horizon, because I want to negotiate before we dive into war."

"Well, why exactly do they want war?" Hiccup sat down on one of the long carved benches that bordered the table.

"They won't tolerate a tribe who is so lenient with dragons, in their words."

"Oh. Why don't you just meet here? Or there, on their tribe's land?" He ran his fingers over the rough wood of the tabletop.

Stoick sat down, too, and the bench groaned beneath his weight.

"We have to meet somewhere other than Berk, because, of course, they fear a trap, and they'll be suspicious, and I definitely do not consent to meeting on Thornburgian territory. The journey is too long, for one thing. And they're a bunch of backstabbing murderers, for another."

Hiccup sighed. "How long will you be gone? What are the chances that we'll be called to arms?"

"Well, we'll only be gone a few days. And the chances of war being declared on us are extremely high unless—"

Hiccup looked up. "What can we do?"

"You could come."

Hiccup laughed. "What? How would I help?"

"You could share your story," Stoick said. "You could show them your dragon. If you want to come."

Hiccup looked sideways at me. "Toothless?" He asked.

I got up, and approached them, brushing him gently with my nose.

"That's a yes." He put his hand up and stroked my neck, still looking at his father. "That makes two. When are we leaving?"

* * *

><p>Please don't forget to review! :D

3. Chapter 2

Hey, I got a request to know if it's all going to be in Toothless' POV or not. Well, it carries on with Toothless' viewpoint for a while, but there comes a time in the story where Toothless can't narrate properly if we want the clearest view of the story. But until announced otherwise, the viewpoint sticks with Toothless.

* * *

><p>Chapter 2

The morning dawned bright and sunny, slightly nippy, but not too cold. A thin layer of frost that soon burned off enveloped the individual grass blades. Hiccup woke early, dressed, and, after breakfast, proceeded down to the rocky cliffs where the island fell into the water, down the steep and rickety ramps that led to the sea, and finally, to the piers and jetties that lined the ocean shore.

The salt air tingled in my nose, and the mournful cries of the gulls made my mouth water. I extended my teeth and licked them. I hadn't caught a seagull for ages, one of those would do me good right about now.

Hiccup walked to the end of the longest dock, and I followed close behind him. A large ship was being loaded there, and preparing to board it was Stoick.

Hiccup held up a hand in greeting, and Stoick nodded, and approached.

"My son. What can I do for you?"

"I just came to say goodbye."

"So you've decided not to join us in the ships."

Hiccup shrugged. "I can't leave Toothless behind. And he can't fly without me. And it's been a little while since we were alone

together."

Stoick nodded. "Well, I'll see you soon then. What time do you think you'll arrive?"

"We'll fly over your ship for the most part."

"Good." Stoick put a hand on his son's shoulder, and walked up the gangplank, onto the ship.

Hiccup turned away, and together we walked along the edge of the village, and into the sparse trees that bordered its west side. A well-beaten trail led the way before us. As we travelled through, the woods grew thicker, and thick pines and firs gradually replaced the bare deciduous trees. Amber rays of light lit up the soft forest floor. It was quiet and calm here, except for the occasional twitter of a bird.

The path came to a fork. The right side was straight and very distinguishable, but the left side meandered away, much harder to pick out from the patches of light and dark than the right trail.

Hiccup turned towards the left fork; it was the one he used all the time, but then remembered what we were doing, and started down the right.

Nobody ever used either of these trails, but their difference in size and appearance was due to their makers. Hiccup had made the left path, stepping over rocks and weaving between trees, in his quest to find and kill me. His trail often doubled back on itself and went in semicircles, but it was better than nothing.

The other had been made by one of his forefathers, so far back that no one remembered who exactly, or why. In any case, it was still wide enough to let a Night Fury pass.

We followed the trail through the forest, until suddenly, in a blaze of sunlight and a burst of fresh salt air, it came out onto the high cliffs of Berk.

A ribbon of grass ran along the edges of the precipice, the long stalks undulating in perfect unison as the wind brushed them, making a tiny sea of rippling waves. About one hundred feet after the narrow field began, it ended, and the land dropped suddenly into the roaring ocean.

Hiccup loved this place, I don't know why, exactly. Every time we came here, he would get down on his hands and knees, and peer over the edge of the giant cliff, breathing in the briny air.

I liked this place, too. The cliffs made me want to spread my wings and dive over their craggy edges, and whenever we came here, my wish was fulfilled. Hiccup and I joined together and leapt over the precipice, defying every law of nature.

Hiccup and I sat in the long grass, watching it rise and fall around us, mimicking the curves and swells of the ocean below. Together we watched his father's ships set off, cutting the water with their dragon shaped prows, his arm around my back, my tail around his

shoulders. He rested his head on my side and closed his eyes, and all was perfect in the world.

The breeze ruffled his red hair, dancing through it and then skipping off to rustle the leaves of the trees behind us. His fingers ran over my scales, slowly and rhythmically. We looked at the horizon for a long time, not thinking of anything but how happy and content we were, not thinking of worry or strife, rejoicing in the very thought of living if we could be together like this always.

Hiccup let out a long breath, and the flame of excitement ignited in my heart, as I thought of plunging with him over those precarious precipices.

He stood, and I stood with him, and then he swung his good foot over my back, and buckled the leather straps connecting him to my saddle.

"Are you ready?" He called. I roared, and let out a long blue flame. Then I spread my wings to their full extent. He whooped.

We dropped over the edge, and I angled my wings so that they would not interfere with gravity's pull. We shot downwards, faster than an arrow, faster than a hawk, pointed straight at the sea below us. Hiccup leaned forward, until his chest was touching my back. He was laughing with joy, gripping my saddle with all his might. If we had been flat out instead of nose down, he would've raised his arms and fingered the rushing air, but if he had let go in this position, he would've been snatched off of my back, such was the force of the wind.

We plummeted down, until certain death in the form of crashing into the sea was only moments away, and then I snapped my wings out to either side.

We pulled up sharply, and I levelled out.

Hiccup yelled with joy, and flung his arms up, and I let out my ecstasy the only way I could – I breathed a long flame again, painting the sky in front of me a brilliant turquoise, and then swerved so we wouldn't run into it.

"Thanks, buddy," Hiccup laughed. He didn't enjoy getting singed by my blaze, it had happened before.

I rose to a current of warmer air, and we set a course for the west, following the chief's ships.

4. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Hiccup sat with the side of his face against my neck, and we enjoyed the day together. I flew lazily south, following the Viking fleet, riding the wind like an eagle, wings taut, balancing on the draughts.

When we came to a scattering of high rocks jutting up out of the water, we flew between them and around them, chasing seagulls and

doing a few more dives, just for fun. Sometimes we flew so low that when I angled my wings, I could touch the water, and sometimes we flew so high that the top of Hiccup's head brushed the clouds. Sometimes we flew close to the chief's fleet, weaving in between the towering masts, sometimes we flew ahead so far that we had to turn around, for fear of losing our way, and other times we fell behind so much that Hiccup couldn't see the ships at all, and I could only see black smudges on the horizon. It was an uneven pace, perfect for journeys that weren't too long and weren't too short.

As the day wore on, I began to notice more Viking ships gathering around our fleet. I accelerated, until I could make out the designs on their sails.

These designs did nothing to improve my suspicions; in fact, they made them worse. Bright blue Nadders impaled on swords and spears glared up at me from their white canvas backgrounds.

I growled, supposing these to be attacking pirates, and drew a deep breath, ready to blow billows of fire.

"No, Toothless!" Hiccup sat up suddenly and put his hand on the top of my head, between my ears. "They have friendly colours up. Don't attack unless they do!"

I dove closer to the ships, ready and waiting. The lead ship of the new fleet was brightly coloured. Gazing up at us were all the Vikings in the ship. They pointed, and with satisfaction, I heard one or two whisper, "Night Fury!" in awe. Most of the men reached for their weapons.

"Don't attack!" Called Hiccup urgently. "We're friends. Don't attack."

The only Viking who did not stare up at me with awe was a girl with extremely short brown hair. Sitting near the prow, she looked at me with a disdainful twist of the mouth. Her green eyes sparkled malevolently.

I wasn't satisfied that these men were harmless. Who were they, and what did they want?

I flew beside their ship for about fifteen minutes, scrutinizing every detail. It was made of dark, dark wood that shone in the midday sun like polished ebony. It might've seemed beautiful to a human â€" but the wood reminded me of charred bones, burnt black, carved and shining, but nonetheless a hideous sight. Finally I left their ship's side and veered away to the right, gaining altitude until the ship was a tiny dot far below us.

After we had flown for hours, Hiccup raised his head again, and pointed to a small island, covered in sheets of stone and rising to a rounded point. It was patterned with stunted trees. I could see Stoick's ships moored on the shoreline.

"There it is," he said.

We landed in a small dip in the stony ground. It was beaten by sea spray and whipped with salty winds, but speckled with shrubs and one or two spruce and a small pine. Rough grass spiked up from cracks in

the rocks, and a tiny stream of water from melting snow and ice cascaded down the jagged edges of the boulders " all in all, a pleasant place.

Hiccup dismounted and threw his cloak around his shoulders.

He stumbled slightly on the uneven ground, and I quickly bent down to support him.

As Hiccup straightened, wincing at the pain in his leg, someone rounded the corner of the rock formation.

Not knowing whom it was, I stepped quickly in front of Hiccup, and raised my wings, ready to protect him with my life. He was more vulnerable than most humans, being unable to run, since he had lost one of his feet. I was the one who had to be there for him. But then I saw who had come into view, and I lowered my wings again, but tentatively.

It was Stoick the Vast. I knew Hiccup trusted him, because he was his father. And I suppose you could say I trusted him. I did my best, but it's hard to forgive a man who chains you up and growls in your ear, "Lead us home, devil," because he wants to locate your nest and kill all of your race that he finds there.

Stoick's face bore a flicker of similar mistrust " just a flicker. I had saved his only son's life, after all, but one does not shed the mantle of a life filled with Dragon Blood lightly. If hundreds of dragons were slaughtered at your hands, you don't abandon the practice without a second thought. It had taken Stoick a lot of second thoughts to get to where he was right now.

But what else could I do, but fold my wings all the way back, and look at Stoick, waiting for him to speak?

He had come to tell us what to do. "Hiccup, light a fire and make yourself comfortable. Not all of the chiefs have arrived. When they have, I'll come and get you. Then you can tell your story to them."

Hiccup nodded.

I swooped down to the sea, and after only a few minutes, found four fish. I gathered them in my claws, and ascended back to Hiccup's hiding place. He now had a fire pit, which I lit with a single puff of flames. Above the fire pit, he constructed a grill of green branches, and after cleaning them, grilled the fish. He gathered some of the flavourful plants that were growing in the clearing, and scattered them on the fish. He then collected some brown mushrooms.

When they were ready, I snapped up two fish.

_ Hiccup is a good cook, _ I thought, savouring the flavour. _But why humans eat other, tasteless plants is beyond me._ I watched Hiccup devouring the mushrooms. He offered me some, but I growled.

When he was done a fish, he threw me the other, and, his cloak over him, curled on a grassy stretch of the ground. Presently, he drifted off into a light sleep.

I curled around him, my wings over him, shielding him from the sea spray. I did not sleep, but kept watch for any sign of danger.

In my mind, I ran over the day. Peace and contentment had been swept away when I had seen that girl on the Nadder ship. Hiccup hadn't been bothered, but something about her had stirred my fear and suspicion. She wasn't an ordinary little girl. And if her ships had landed with Stoick's and she was on the island, there was no way I was going to fall asleep, and leave my rider vulnerable and alone in the cold world.

If any evil ever came to Hiccup because of my lack of vigilance, I don't know what I'd do. I'd die of a broken heart before I could do any more harm.

And anyway, I was nocturnal, so it made no difference to me whether I slept or stayed awake in the night. I had adjusted my sleeping patterns to fit Hiccup's, but I still spent every spare hour in the day asleep and most hours of the night awake.

I shivered, and moved my wing to cover Hiccup's small body. If anyone wanted to get to him, they'd have to go through me.

I wasn't normally this paranoid, but that Nadder girl creeped me out. She was only about fourteen, but she already had the look of a hardened killer, and I wouldn't be betting that the only things she had slain were dragons.

The fire Hiccup had made sputtered and died. I was surprised to see how dark the night had become, and my eyes refocused to adjust to the deepening twilight. Over the faint sound of Hiccup's breathing, other night noises whispered. A wolf howled. Bushes swayed in the wind. A dragon cried mournfully in the gloom, and I thought of being alone, without a human to share my life with.

Then a tidal wave of black memories came raining down in my head, memories I had often tried to forget.

_ Fire surrounding me in the hive. Never-ending slavery. I'd never had any parents to help me, so I'd hunt for hours as a chick, afraid to return with nothing. Sometimes I hunted for days without finding more than a bird. Then slowly growing up, returning with a deer, for the first time not having to dodge the evil teeth of the queen dragon, the Green Death._

_ But more than the slavery, the loneliness. No family, no friends, fending for myself from the moment my eggshell broke open around me and exposed me to the real world. Everyone â€" even the humans â€" had always feared me. Night Fury, the unknown terror. After I had realized that no one wanted me around, I had kept to myself, only coming out when the Green Death commanded it._

Nobody cared if I lived or died. Had anyone seen me get shot down, or noticed that I hadn't come back? And if they had, had they mourned me as a friend or as a weapon?

I couldn't go back to that life, even if the hive structure had been broken and no one feared me. I wasn't complete without Hiccup, and I never had been.

A firefly sparkled in the grass near my head, rising into the sky and twisting in a figure eight. Another followed it, and the two flew side by side for a moment. A third flew up, and they circled all together.

I sighed, and accidentally incinerated all three.

5. Chapter 4

****Thanks to everyone who's reviewed or favorited or subscribed to this story!****

****Presenting: chapter four!****

* * *

><p>Chapter 4

The morning had dawned before Stoick rounded the corner again. I nudged Hiccup with my nose, and he woke with a soft gasp. Slowly he uncurled and looked around. Then, grasping Stoick's hand, he stood.

Stoick smiled at him, and took him by the hand and led him out of the stone valley and past the turn in the rock face. I got to my feet and followed them closely. But Stoick reappeared and motioned me to wait for a few seconds.

I heard Hiccup's voice. "Even though my father has already made sure you aren't armed, I just want to ask you again not to use weapons. Something is about to happen that I know you won't like, but please - don't react with violence. I swear no harm will come to you if you comply, but I can't guarantee this if you attack." There was a pause, and then, in a more quiet voice, "Toothless, you can come out now."

I moved around the corner of the rock face, and found myself looking at six men standing on a boulder that was higher than the others, Stoick among them. They were obviously the chiefs of the nearby islands.

Their clothing was rich, threaded with bright colours, and all wore elaborate carved sword scabbards at their waists. They all wore bright cloaks at their shoulders, and their hair and beards were braided with gold. Only one wore armour, and instead of exclaiming when he saw me, he held my gaze for longer than I have known any human besides Hiccup to be able to do. A helmet covered his face, and bright green eyes shone out of holes cut in it, emanating pure hatred. I immediately hated him in return.

"This is Toothless," said Hiccup, walking to me and stroking my nose. "He's the only known living Night Fury in the Five Isles."

A chief gasped. "A Night Fury!"

"Today I am here to tell you my story," explained Hiccup.

I settled down onto the hard ground, waiting for Hiccup to finish his

tale.

He told them the story that I had heard a dozen times, as well as lived through.

"I am Hiccup Horrendous Haddock The Third, son of Stoick the Vast. I live on Berk.

Six months ago, there was a dragon attack there.

I shot at a dark shape against the stars, and hit a dragon. I told my father, but he did not believe me, and so I went to find it by myself. I found a Night Fury lying near a clearing. I cautiously approached it, intending to kill it, but â€|"

Hiccup stopped, and shook his head. "I couldn't kill him â€" I wouldn't kill him. He was helpless and injured. It was not the way a hunter of the skies should leave this world, trapped against the ground, unable to defend himself, a Viking child's first prey.

He was afraid of me. I had never been feared, and here was this mighty predator as frightened of me as I was of him. I tried to make myself kill him. But my knife ended up severing his ropes instead of ending his life.

I thought I was done for then. Once the ropes were cut, he sprang up and pounced on me. He roared the loudest roar that I'd ever heard, but didn't go in for the kill â€" even though I'd bet my life he was really hungry. After deafening me, he just sprang up and bounded away.

The next morning I came down to the place again and found that he hadn't left. I got to know him, and I named him Toothless because his teeth are retractable, like a cat's claws. Studying him, I saw that he couldn't fly because his tailwing had been torn off.

"I fashioned him a new one, and now we go everywhere together â€" he can't fly without my help, and, though I can walk without his help, his comfort is worth everything to me. Without each other, we can't function."

He rubbed the top of my head. "He's more than my helper. He was my friend when no one else would be. He was the first living thing that just accepted the fact that I was different from everyone else, and liked me better that way." He shrugged. "I was the first Viking who wouldn't kill a dragon. I guess that makes me a bit of a nerd â€" maybe even a traitor â€" but I don't think the dragons mind.

So, I've come here today to ask you this question: Will you join me? Will you become a member of the small group of Vikings who wouldn't kill dragons?"

The armoured chief eyed Hiccup with contempt.

"If dragons are as good as all that, I would bet you can go up to a wild dragon and ride it from here to the nearest island. But you can't."

Hiccup frowned. "I could!"

He spread his hands. "If you can, I'll send my daughter to be personally taught about dragons on Berk."

Hiccup looked at me, and I looked at him, and there was a smile in his forest green eyes. He knew that they were trying to corner him, laying bets that he couldn't do it. But I knew he could, and he knew it too.

"OK," said Hiccup. "Do you have a wild dragon?"

The chief laughed, and shrugged. "Come down to our ships. We have one in a cage that we caught last night. We are going to drown it, and use its scales for armour."

I could tell that this made Hiccup angry. "If I can tame it, you won't drown it." It was more of a command than a plea.

"We won't," sneered the chief, with the air of one who is laying a lot down on a bet he knows he cannot lose.

Hiccup swung himself up onto me, and I leapt from rock to rock, half spreading my wings, until we were at the shore of the island.

In a cage on the beach was a small Monstrous Nightmare. It was obviously extremely angry, for it was thrashing around, lighting itself on fire every few seconds. Hiccup dismounted me, and knelt before it, looking into its fiery eyes. It seemed to calm for a moment.

The chiefs arrived at that moment, and stood behind my rider, amazed.

Slowly, Hiccup drew his dagger. The Monstrous Nightmare backed away, the fire lighting in its eyes again, its breath crackling with smoke and sparks.

Hiccup grasped the dagger between his index finger and thumb, as if it was a disgusting item, and, reaching his arm as far as he could away from his body, dropped the dagger in the sand. It fell with a dull thud.

Immediately, the Nightmare folded its wings and looked at Hiccup suspiciously.

Hiccup reached across and undid the clasp that held the cage closed. Ever so slowly, he put his hand an inch from the Nightmare's nose, and, bringing his hand back, drew the dragon out. When it was completely out of the cage, he let it smell his hand, and stroked its nose. He stared deep into its eyes, then showed submission by breaking the gaze and looking downward.

Without going out of the dragon's range of view, he touched its back. It flared its wings, but then, after a second of the contact, did not resist. He drew away his hand, and touched its back again. When there was no reaction, he inched out of the dragon's field of vision, and stroked it for a second. Then he made his move. Slowly he shifted his hand upwards, until he was grasping one of the spikes on its back. The dragon still did not react. Trying not to move suddenly, he climbed up until he was sitting where his hand had been a second ago.

A tremor ran through the dragon as Hiccup stroked its wings, the delicate membrane trembling slightly. Then the massive wings unfolded. Hiccup whispered something. For a moment, everything was still, no one moved a muscle " and then the dragon took off.

Hiccup knew how to steer dragons even without saddle or bridle, and he was doing a masterful job. He rode it in a circle, then, as he had promised, set out for the nearest island, which we could see easily. Within ten minutes, we saw him circle it. My sharp dragon ears caught the sound of the armoured chief muttering curses under his breath, but I don't think anyone else heard him.

They were back at our beach. Hiccup slid off of the dragon, and stood facing us.

The armoured chief's arms were folded, and an expression of anger disfigured his already-ugly features as he saw Hiccup drop down from the dragon's back, and as he saw the Nightmare fly away into the sky. But the other chiefs were exclaiming and praising Hiccup, and Stoick was beaming proudly.

"Good job, son!"

"Your highness, that was most excellent. I am deeply impressed," said a chief with a short gold beard.

Hiccup blushed and looked down, fingering the edge of his coat.

"Thanks," He mumbled.

The green-eyed chief spat on the ground.

* * *

><p>It looked like we would be having a student on Berk.<p>

The only daughter of the green-eyed armoured chief of Thornburg was brought to us.

When I saw her, I knew her. I had seen her on the ship Hiccup and I had passed when we had been flying to the island.

Now I learned that her name was Kenna Nadderslayer.

Her posture was rigid, and she too wore amour, plate amour that was etched with a blue insignia that matched the sails of her ship, a dying dragon.

She was shorter than Hiccup by a couple of inches, but she didn't have an ounce of extra weight on her body. She was perfectly balanced, and her movements were graceful, like those of a wolf.

It was almost impossible to scrutinize her face, because when you could see her eyes, even in your peripheral vision, they drew your gaze.

You caught a glimpse of fair, well-formed lips, a flash of an

attractive nose and then her eyes caught you and held you.

They were bordered by striking black lashes, long and beautiful. And within those frames, green shields, each with a coal-black boss.

Her pupils were mysterious everlasting tunnels. Bordering these were ribbons of emerald, like all the greens of the world melted in a fire of hatred and anger. Grass, melted, trees, melted, all plants, dissolved, thrown into the boiling, seething, sparkling cooking pot of her eyes.

Hiccup's eyes were green, too, but they were a completely different kind of green, a forest green, shot through with copper, and, like a forest, dappled with shadows and patches of light. They were peaceful, they beckoned, telling you that they would comfort you and warm you and give you a home, and tell you a story.

There was no hint of warmth in Kenna Nadderslayer's burning orbs.

Peaeye Nadderslayer, the armoured chief, handed her over to us reluctantly, but Kenna walked to our ships without hesitation, seeming almost eager. Her head was held high.

She sat in the prow of the ship like a chieftainess, slowly rubbing a rock over her axe, eyeing me the way a caged hawk would eye a mouse that was just beyond the reach of its talons.

I took off so that I wouldn't have to be under that fierce gaze anymore.

Hiccup talked to me a little on the flight back to Berk. Normally we just flew in companionable silence — after all, I wasn't human and couldn't speak — but today Hiccup tried to describe to me how the Nadderslayers made him feel.

"They're hungry for blood, Toothless, and they don't care if it's dragons or humans that they get it from. I'd hate to be on the wrong end of their axes. But I think, somehow, that one day I will be. I'm not looking forward to it."

6. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

The next week was horrible. Kenna hardly said a word, but she didn't need to talk — her contempt was expressed in her eyes and her actions.

The first day, Hiccup told Kenna that he didn't want trouble.

"You don't want to be here, and I'm not too happy about it either. Your father sent you here, and my father's expecting me to teach you some stuff about dragons — what, I don't know. After two weeks, you can go back to Thornburg, and we never need to meet ever again."

She looked at him from under half-closed eyes. "I'll find use for being here, Hiccup. Don't you worry. Don't — you — worry."

There was something sinister in the way she said that, and my ears perked up to catch any other words, but she didn't say anything else.

Hiccup had noticed her tone, too.

Like so many times, I could read his mind by the look on his face.

_ Who are you, Kenna? What do you want with us?_

* * *

><p>At lunch on the third day of Kenna's stay at Berk, Hiccup, who had been mumbling to a Terrible Terror perched on his arm, finally gave in. He had been under immense pressure from Stoick to teach Kenna about dragons, and he couldn't hold out any longer against reasonable arguments from all sides.<p>

Under normal circumstances, Hiccup would have been elated to have a chance to teach someone about dragons.

But Kenna was not a normal circumstance.

He couldn't explain itâ€| the horrible sinister way Kenna's eyes glowed with loathing and longing when she saw a dragonâ€| the way you could tell she abhorred you without ever a word being spoken.

Neither Hiccup nor I wanted to be around her â€| but we had no choice.

He cleared his throat, and Kenna looked up.

"I have to teach you about dragons today."

She didn't reply, but she emanated the silent question â€" "Why?"

"_Because_," said Hiccup. This would've sounded stupid in any other situation â€" it was an answer to a nonexistent question â€" but with Kenna the inquiry was unmistakable. "My dad wants me to," He finished, and turned back to the Terror, running a finger along its soft spines.

"When?" Asked Kenna, out loud this time.

"I guess this afternoon. I'll try to be quick."

Kenna turned back to her lunch with a mocking noise. "Try to be quick," She mimicked. "Any idiot with a dragon is going to ramble on for hours, and you are the worst Viking at being quick I've ever seen."

Hiccup didn't reply.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and I led Kenna down to the shore of Berk, into the Dragon Training Arena. Once home to death and violence, the stadium was now a peaceful meeting place for dragons and humans.<p>

He sat down on the floor there, and she remained standing, leaning against the wall.

"We'll start with the most common."

He gave a resounding whistle. The haunting note echoed off the walls for a moment, and then two Terrible Terrors flew lopsidedly into the arena.

Hiccup picked one up and it sat on his knee, looking up at him with bright orange eyes.

"The Terrible Terror," He began. "It's the smallest dragon we know of â€" almost completely harmless except for the fact that they travel in packs. There was once a horde of them numbering over 200 â€" try to fight off that and you're dead."

He stroked it under the chin, in just the right spot, and it fell to the ground, in transports of joy.

"That's the key." He picked the little dragon up again. "It's a tiny weak spot, found on all dragons. If you tickle them there, they'll be immobilized. It isn't like a sleep coma, though. In a sleep coma, a dragon may feel like it is dead. They'll have no obvious pulse or heartbeat, and their chest won't rise or fall with breath. They normally do that when they're severely injured and need time and energy to heal themselves."

Kenna's Terror had attacked her knee, and had been successfully repelled. Both now flew away, squawking.

"Next â€" the Hideous Zippleback.

It's big â€" one of the largest dragons we've seen. Zipplebacks can fly, but their wings are weak and they like to hunt on the ground, after dark."

A dragon crept out of the shadows, where even Kenna's sharp eyes hadn't seen it.

Bright, acid green from head to tail, the Zippleback reared its two heads and roared.

"Shhh," Hiccup said quietly. "Shhh." He got up and put his hand on one of its scaly shoulders.

"With its tactic of breathing gas and then igniting it, the Zippleback's attack is dangerous and unique â€" not to be taken lightly. Nor is the Monstrous Nightmare's."

He gave another whistle, a different note, even more haunting than the first.

"It won't come out until it's scouted out who's called it and what's waiting for it," said Hiccup.

We waited for a moment, then, through the doors crept a spiky, agile dragon, eyes yellow as two bright suns.

"The Monstrous Nightmare can swallow Vikings whole," said Hiccup, as the dragon bared its teeth. "It is highly aggressive, and will never run from a fight. Its fire is thick and sticky. It also has a nasty habit of lighting itself on fire.

Up there â€" he pointed â€" "That's a Gronckle. They're lazy. They've been known to fall asleep when they're flying. But what they lack in speed, they make up with their manoeuvrability â€" they can hover, and fly backwards, forwards, and sideways."

"There are two other species of dragon living on Berk. The first is the Night Fury."

He put his hand on my neck. "The rarest and most intelligent species. I could go on for hours about their wing-body ratio and flight powers.

But what you need to know is just this: don't mess with a Night Fury. Its high-speed attack and its wary, analytical nature couple to make the Night Fury a lethal opponent. If you find yourself on the wrong side of a Night Fury, hide behind a rock and pray it doesn't find you. But knowing Night Furies â€" it will. And the last species of dragonâ€"|"

He whistled for the last time, the sound soft and lingering, and a bright blue and yellow dragon climbed down the walls and landed near Hiccup, who sat down again, and drew his knees up under his chin.

"The Nadder. It's active at any time of day or night, and, though it is nimble in the air, will pretty much always land before attacking. Like Terrible Terrors, they raid in groups. As for weaponry â€" the Nadder has the hottest fire known to man. The blast can reduce a Viking to ash in seconds. And the tail of the Nadder can discharge a volley of sharp spikes."

Kenna spat onto the ground. "In Thornburg, we eat Terrible Terrors for breakfast. There are a few Monstrous Nightmares, who get them killed because they won't back away, and a few more Hideous Zipplebacks, who are a bit smarter, and cower in their caves at the mere mention of us.

But there are mostly Nadders. Nadders in the trees, ready to jump down. Nadders who steal food, and Nadders that set fire to our crops. Nadders everywhere.

When I was four years old, my father, Peaeye, killed three of these cursed dragons with one blow from his axe. He became chief for this mighty act. He received the name of Nadderslayer.

When I was ten, I duplicated the feat, and earned the title.

I have to wait until my father dies to become chieftainess, but I will.

And when I do, I'll make sure that all the dragons are eradicated."

She looked up at me, and, with a flash of green, her eyes scrutinized me. The same way you would scrutinize a game animal. With murder in

your eyes.

Hiccup stood in one fluid motion that betrayed anger and haste, and I knew he was regretting his lack of weapons.

"If you lay a finger on that dragon, I wouldn't bet on your chances of seeing another sunrise," he said.

Hiccup was a gentle boy, but his voice was hard, harder than stone, and dangerous.

"Do you think I'm afraid of you?" scoffed Kenna.

"I'm not the one you should be afraid of," said Hiccup, still in that soft and perilous voice. "If you even touch that knife—"

I looked at Hiccup. His face was angry — flushed and hot. I knew that Kenna's awful talk had driven home.

Kenna looked at me, and I looked at her, and hate flickered in the bright emerald eyes.

She turned and stalked out of the arena, leaving Hiccup staring after her with a look of anger and suspicion.

7. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

It was a gruelling week. Every night, Hiccup and I curled up in his room, thankful to be away from Kenna, and every morning, we avoided her until we absolutely had to talk with her.

Hiccup was sitting at the breakfast table one day, face in his hands, when his father brought up something that just made everything worse.

"Son — I have to attend an urgent meeting called by Peaeye Nadderslayer, and — well — since we're sort of trying to make peace with them, I told him I'd be there."

"So what?" asked Hiccup.

"Well — it's too long a distance at too short a notice for me to take a ship — or even a normal dragon. We're taking the ten best dragons on Berk, but we need the best of the best, and—"

Hiccup gave a little groan, and put his head on the table.

"Dad!" he moaned. "Do you have any idea how difficult the situation you just put me in is? It's like asking me to give up my arms and legs for a week."

He took a deep breath, and looked up at me.

"You have my permission, father. For the good of the tribe. But only if Toothless consents. What do you say, Toothless?"

I spread my wings halfheartedly.

"He'll go," Hiccup told Stoick, rather miserably. "But you'll be back soon, right?"

"We leave tomorrow morning â€" it'll take a day and a half a day on the fastest dragon in Berk to get there, and who knows how long Peaeye will detain us there?"

Hiccup sighed, and started to eat his breakfast again.

Under the table, his living foot brushed my living tailwing, and the faint touch said it all. We needed each other. What could we do alone? My wing brushed his foot again, and I tried to communicate to him the resentment I felt at Stoick's request.

He ran his foot over the ridges in my wing.

I don't want you to go either. But hey, he's the chief. What he says goes.

I growled faintly. It was just a slight rumble in my throat, but he heard.

He shrugged. _I'm sorry. I wish you didn't have to go - I love you. I'll miss you._

He tapped his foot against my wing again.

_ Whatever you do, be careful._

8. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Later, in the evening, I lay in the small cove that Hiccup and I loved to spend our time in, pondering the day's events. Hiccup and I had gone to the sea cliffs for one last flight before I had to leave. We had taken off from the village, and flown to the cliffs, for some alone time together. When we had gotten there, we met Kenna Nadderslayer, sitting at the edge of one of the precipices, something that looked like paper clutched in her hand. Hiccup had asked her how long she had been there, and she had replied, "Hours. Hours and hours."

By then, a light snow had started, so she had come home with Hiccup and I. the time we got back to the village, the flakes were falling thick and fast. When I had seen them safely to the hall, I had left to hunt in the forest. By now, I had caught several fish, and was enjoying them, huddled in the snow, watching the grey sky.

My ear twitched forward, and I sat up.

Someone was coming.

Through the thick snow, I could just see a boy, his head bent, his arms around himself for warmth.

I knew who it was, and got silently to my feet. The snow muffled the noise of my wings rustling, and I moved toward him as quietly as the

snowflakes falling from the sky.

He didn't notice me until I was right in front of him - his eyes were filled with tears, and I could see the frozen tracks of the ones that had already spilled down his cheeks.

I stared at him for a long time, and he held his gaze, just as unblinking as I was.

Then I bent down. He closed his eyes, and I brushed my nose against his forehead, trying to comfort him, trying to tell him that it was all going to be alright.

What had happened, I wondered, to make him cry?

He swallowed and drew a shaky breath.

I cleared a space of ground by sweeping my tail across it, and then curled up on the exposed grass. Hiccup sat down, his right shoulder against my left side. I put my wing over him, and turned my head to look at him.

"I guess you're wondering what happened. Well, I'm wondering that, too." He looked up at the grey sky, and watched the snowflakes float down for a while.

He took a deep breath.

"Astrid's angry at me, I think. Why?" He gave a shaky laugh, "I don't know. What did I do? Do you know?"

He turned and looked at me, and I shook my head, as much at a loss as he.

He shrugged. "I think - I think she thinks I like someone besides her. I don't. She's the only girl I could ever love - who could take her place?"

A thought occurred to me, but I couldn't speak it. I had no voice to express my thoughts.

Hiccup wiped his cheeks, and I drew my wing up closer to my body, until Hiccup was in a living tent, black as pitch. He reached up and touched the arch of membrane that made the roof of his shelter, and then settled down, less in a sitting position and more in a lying position.

With my eyes watching over him, he fell asleep.

We only returned to the village when twilight had fallen.

* * *

><p>Sorry for the shortness! The next two chapters are itsty-bitsy, so I'll upload them really fast, one after the other, BAM! BAM!

Anyway, please review! Pretty please? *Big, innocent, pleading Night Fury eyes

9. Chapter 8

****Oh, man, this is short. It looked longer on Microsoft Word. Next chapter will be up within 10 minutes I hope.****

* * *

<p>Chapter 8

It was time for me to go.

It was the first time I had ever willingly left my Rider, and I felt like I was leaving part of myself behind â€| Stoick could never replace Hiccup, and he was heavy on my back. Hiccup was only about eighty pounds, being small and thin, but his father was a monster.

Hiccup stood with his head against mine, his dark, dark green eyes reflecting the moon.

"Goodbye, dad."

"Come back soon, Toothless," He added in a whisper.

I spread my wings reluctantly, willing him to know that I would rather put out my life-fire than delay my return.

Hiccup turned and walked slowly away, but, as I was flying through the air, it occurred to me that his footsteps had died out of hearing sooner then they should've.

10. Chapter 9

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 9****

I watched Toothless fly away for a moment, then turned back to the path, my heart heavy. As I trudged back to the village alone, the wind rustled in the berry bushes on both sides of the path, and the moon cast weird shapes on the ground.

Then I saw I footprint that I had not made on the path in front of me. It was unthinkable that any other human being would've been on this trail â€" it led nowhere but to the steep cliffs. As I bent down to examine it, I felt a sharp pain across the back on my head and knew no more.

* * *

<p>That was the shortest chapter I've ever published. The next one will be longer. A LOT longer.

11. Chapter 10

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 10****

I woke with a sudden pain on my face. Just by the feel I could tell that I had been struck with an armoured hand.

"Get up," a rough voice ground in my ear.

I tried to rub my head " it was aching fiercely " and found that my arms were chained.

The armoured hand struck me again across the face. I tasted blood.

"Get up."

I struggled to my knees and found myself looking into the face of a man. He was extremely thin " a rare trait for a Viking " and had no beard. He wore a helmet of a dull silver colour that covered the upper half of his face. His eyes gleamed hungrily from the holes that the helmet had to see out of, green sparks in the background of darkness. Something about him gave me the creeps " and adding to his quality of eeriness was the sensation that I knew him " that I had seen him before. But I had not seen him on Berk, of that I was sure.

"Where am I?" I gasped.

"Look around," he replied.

I did so, and found myself in a ship. It was made of a dark wood, and its prow was in the shape of a monstrous dragon, painted black except for the eyes, which glowed red in a pupiless glare. I was chained to a dark iron post with filthy, rusty shackles, which were attached at my ankles and my wrists. My foot and my hands were numb because the blood flow had been restricted.

The ship was in a harbour, but not one that I had ever seen. Our ship was moored to a slimy-looking pier. The pier led up to a beach with black and brown pebbles instead of sand, and past that beach loomed a fortress, carved out of solid grey rock.

"Where am I?" I repeated. The man did not reply but took a set of keys out of his cloak and released my bonds.

The man pulled me to my feet, and I almost fell over. My hands were non-responsive, and tingled as the blood returned to them, and my one good foot was unfeeling.

The man grabbed me roughly. I tried to pull away, but was helpless in his iron grip. He then seized my coat and dragged me along, stumbling to keep my balance. Every step was excruciating, for the blood had been kept back so long that my hands and foot felt like they were being stabbed with knives.

He led me up to the fortress, and through a door made of the same black wood.

He grew increasingly angry at my fumbling steps and when we came to a staircase and I staggered again, he drew a whip from his belt. I did not wince outwardly at the sight of the weapon, but inside my heart

sped up.

"Step with care," he said, curling it around his hand.

I was yanked along through passageway after passageway, passing numerous Vikings with dark hair and olive skin. My foot grew gradually easier to handle, but even under normal circumstances, walking was not comfortable without my dragon, and here the floor was slippery and we were hurrying along at quite a pace. I paid for my numerous stumbles with deep cuts from the whip.

He pulled me along until we reached a part of the fortress where there were many guards in grey armour.

I cast a furtive glance around, and saw many iron doors with small barred windows in them.

I shivered. However my life was going to end, it wasn't going to be caged in a cell. Not if I could help it.

I fell to the ground, scraping my knee this time. The man bent down to pull me back up, but before he could, I had kicked his feet from under him, and started to scramble down the hall, back the way we had come.

I stumbled as fast as I could away from the man, using the wall for support, but before I had gone more than twenty steps, I felt a vicelike grip lock around my upper arm from behind, and a voice in my ear. "That wasn't smart, boy."

The man twisted my arm so far around I was sure it would break, and then dragged me along until we reached the door of a cell.

He chained me to the wall by a long fetter that clamped around my ankle. I tried to resist, but despite the fact that he was skinny, he was extremely strong.

When he had finished his work, I had given up my efforts to defy him, and was lying curled on my side as best I could â€" my back hurt too much from the whiplashes to lie on it â€" sore all over, on the damp floor.

"Now, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock The Third, I will answer all your questions."

I uncurled slowly, and rolled to face the man, and quickly looked away from his gleaming eyes, green even where the whites should be â€" or if there were whites, I couldn't see them.

"Where am I?" I asked, my cheek cold against the gritty floor. "How do you know my name?"

"Doesn't everyone of importance in the Five Isles know the name of Hiccup? The one they all want to kill â€" or capture at the very least?"

His cold eyes flashed with mirth at my confusion.

Berk is an important island. If you had the heir in your keeping, you could persuade his father to part with his kingdom â€" and if you had

the heir's body in your keeping â€| oh, then the benefits would also be great. The island would have no heir, and when Stoick died â€" of old age or otherwise â€" Berk would be weak. But, fortunately for you, there are more risks with the second option. The other islands would notice that Berk was weak, for one. And Stoick could remarry and have other children."

I knew that the second risk was nonexistent. Stoick had loved my mother too much to choose another wife. If he were going to, he would have done it by now. But I wasn't going to tell the thin man this, or he might decide that option B was better. And then I wouldn't live to see the result.

I wet my lips. "I hope that my father keeps Berk instead of choosing me."

The man smiled. "Brave words. But tell me â€| truly, in your deepest heart, wouldn't you rather be with your father â€" not on Berk, but with your father nonetheless, â€" or would you rather have it that the last thing you ever feel be an arrow in your chest or a knife in your neck?"

"Being the chief's son, it most likely would've ended that way anyway," I shrugged, but I had a sinking feeling that if I dug past the outer layer of thoughts and feelings, tunnelled away through my hopes and dreams, broke up the thick covering of memories, and looked into the haze of the darkest, deepest, most unfathomable depths of my soul, I would find that I wanted to know that my father cared for me more than his land. I wanted a letter to arrive saying that he would give up Berk for his only son. But I feared that which I knew, and pushed it back down into the farthest corners of my mind.

The green-eyed man was standing. I remained on the ground, fighting back tears for Berk.

Either I would see my father again, but not Berk, or I would never see anything again.

Either way, the night sky I had seen when I went to say goodbye to Stoick and Toothless was the last night sky I had seen from Berk. That night had been the last time that I had felt the soft heather of the ground of my island spring under me. That night had been the last time I had looked at the dark forests spreading beneath me, and the last time I had smelled the clear air of Berk's high cliffs. The last time I had visited the clearing where I had met my dragon and my destiny.

That night, I tried to keep back the tears, but in the morning, I woke to discover that they had leaked out under my closed eyelids, burning salty tracks down my bruised face.

* * *

><p>A penny for your thoughts?

12. Chapter 11

**A/N: So, people have requested that I switch viewpoints during chapters, instead of just posting tiny little chapters. I agree on

one hand, but then, on the other, I really don't like it when people switch viewpoints randomly during their chapters, sticking a note in there that says, "So-and-so's POV". I find those notes really unprofessional when they're in the middle of a chapter - when they're at the beginning or the end, I don't care, but right in the middle of the flow, I find, is weird. Plus, when I change viewpoints, I often am changing places - Hiccup's hundreds of miles away from Toothless right now, and if I jump between their viewpoints - I don't know, it just doesn't seem right to me. However, I will, wherever possible, make chapters longer by combining them. Thanks for the feedback! :)**

* * *

><p>As told by Toothless

Chapter 11

That night I slept uneasily. In my dreams I kept seeing Hiccup. He was chained in a ship â€| now he was being led up steep stairs, a whip wound across his back â€| he kept stumbling. _He's really right here_, I thought dreamily. _He's near me._

I shifted, and his saddle felt empty and hollow without his slight weight in it. Why was it still on? Hiccup always took it off before we went to sleep. â€| But Stoick didn't â€|

I struggled in a haze of half-reality, trying to determine what was true and what was not.

Then, in my mind's eye I saw Hiccup lying in a cold cell, his red hair all over his face, his eyes wide and terrified. His feet were chained. A dark shadow was leaning over him, brandishing a whip that had a streak of blood across it.

And I knew without a doubt that it was real.

But no matter how far from me he was now, we had to get back to the island. From there I would navigate to my rider.

I got to my feet and shook my head. Stoick was lying on the ground near me. I nudged him. He awoke with a start, reaching for his weapons, but then saw that it was just me.

I spread my wings, indicating that I wanted to fly.

He shook his head stupidly. "Go back to sleep, Toothless."

I growled desperately. _He's got to be the dumbest chief in the Five Isles, _I thought. Stoick had rolled over and gone back to sleep.

I lit his helmet on fire.

His beard smoked blue for a moment before he was awake again. He beat at the flames, and put them out with no difficulty.

"Stop it," He said as I spread my wings again.

I was growing frantic by now. I ran in a circle, then opened my wings one last time, and took to the air. I could not steer myself, and I

came down none too gently on the grassy field. The thing that I hated most in my life overcame me in a burning wave â€" helplessness. Hiccup was in danger, I knew it, and here I was, unable to rescue him, unable to leave the ground. I ambled worriedly to the edge of the island and looked out to sea.

Then I heard Stoick's call.

"I'm going back to Berk!"

"Why?" came a dozen sleepy voices.

"Hiccup's dragon is worried. It may be that my son is in danger. But you can go on without me."

"When are you leaving?" asked a man.

"Right now," I heard Stoick reply, and a pressing weight settled on my saddle.

Without further ado, I leapt into the air, and started flapping as hard as I could back to Berk. A picture flashed in my mind again, of Hiccup cowering on the ground, and then a new one blazed into existence. Hiccup was lying curled on his side. He was sleeping, but he was shaking and tears were pushing themselves out from under his eyelids.

And he was whispering my name, his voice trembling. _Toothless,_ he said so softly I almost didn't hear it. _Toothless, please come._

And somewhere in my mind I knew without a shadow of doubt that it was real.

I flew through the night, and sighted on Berk in the early morning.

I folded my wings and dived from my place among the clouds. In my ears rang the sound of the screaming wind, but it brought me no pleasure without Hiccup with me to enjoy it â€" there is nothing I like better than a good dive, from thousands and thousands of feet off the ground, but at this time I felt that if my Rider was not here to share my life, what was there really in a dive? It gave no one but yourself pleasure. I needed Hiccup.

13. Chapter 12

****Oh! Short chapter again :(So sorry!****

****'Kay, people, I have two things to say:****

****1 - I'm obsessed with HTTYD again (I used to be completely obsessed, then it went away, and now it's back)! I guess that doesn't really matter to you guys, but it potentially means more work on this and a sequel (PERHAPS, if you guys feel like it).****

****And number 2 - WATCH THIS (without the spaces)****

****h t t p : / / w w w . y o u t u b e . c o m / w a t c h ? f e a t u**

r e = p l a y e r _ e m b e d d e d & v = w T i 3 E k A u 7 s
s**

No, honestly. PLEASE! It's the reason I love HTTYD again! If you're anything like me, if you love HTTYD at all, it will thrill your SOCKS off.

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

Chapter 12

I sat motionless in my cell, all energy I might have devoted to moving having been drained out of me from lack of food and water. The cruel icy chain that secured me to the wall cut into ankle, restricting movement. Even if I had wanted to shift my position, it would've been a painful ordeal, because the shackles would've scraped against my already bleeding skin.

Even though my body felt blurred by the pain, my mind was still clear. Too clear, like a high note that made your ears feel like splinters were being driven into them.

Sometimes your thoughts aren't the best companions when you are lonely, and this was one of those times. They pounded in my head, filling my heart with doubt.

Who really cared about me? Who in the wide world? And even if they did care, did I really want them to? Was I worth the island? Would I prefer death to knowing my father cared more for me than for his country? Would I prefer death to knowing that my father cared more for his country than for me? Death or life, life or deathâ€|

My stomach burned with hunger. I had refused to eat the food that the Thornburgian guards had brought me. They never brought me bread, but always meat. I had had a bad feeling about it from the start, and then I had realized how funny they would think it if the dragon-lover's last meal was a Terrible Terror. So I didn't eat.

The man who had brought me to the island had visited me, and I had asked him who he was.

"Peaeye Nadderslayer, chief of this realm, boy. We've met before."

I looked up into his helmed face again, and realized that I had seen it on the island where the clan chiefs had met. He was the man I had defied by flying a wild dragon. Kenna's father. That explained why I had felt like I knew him.

"Why have you come?" I asked him.

"To gloat, of course," he purred. "But I also have to take something from you."

He drew a long, bejewelled dagger.

I backed away, but he reached out a hand and held my face with an iron grip. His fingernails dug into my skin. "Be stillâ€|" his voice rasped.

I shook with silent fear. My breathing came in gasps.

With lightning speed, he moved the hand that held my face and grasped a lock of my hair. He then raised his knife, and cut through the strands.

I was released, and stumbled backwards. He smiled at me, and fingered the curl of hair as though it was a rare treasure.

"I haven't hurt you this time, Hiccup," he said softly. "But next time, you will not be so lucky."

14. Chapter 13

****As told by Toothless****

****Chapter 13****

When we landed, the Vikings of Berk immediately swarmed around us, shouting news and holding out a letter to Stoick, saying it had arrived by raven only hours ago.

I sighed with impatience. Hiccup could be dying. There was no time to read a letter.

Tapping my tail against the ground, I watched Stoick read the letter without caring what it said, until Stoick turned white.

I had never seen him go pale before, and watched with mild interest.

A sea breeze gusted through us, and borne on the wind was something that had fallen out of the letter when it had been unfolded.

For a second, I thought it was a fall leaf, reddish brown and tiny. Then I realized what it was. The strand of hair blew toward Astrid, and she caught it out of the air.

She stared at it for a moment, then looked up at Stoick.

"What does the letter say?" she asked, and there was silence all around.

Stoick didn't say anything, and I looked down at the strand of hair that was clutched between Astrid's fingers. It was the exact colour and texture of Hiccup's hair, just the right thickness, just the right shade...

"What does it say?" she demanded, more urgently than before. "Where is Hiccup?"

"In Thornburg," Stoick replied shakily.

My heart skipped a beat.

"Perfect," Astrid spat. "Are we invited to the wedding?"

I looked at Astrid in surprise. What was she saying? And then I

realized why Hiccup had been crying, all those days ago, in the cove. Astrid thought that he was in love with Kenna.

And now she thought they had run away to Thornburg together.

I felt a mad desire to both laugh and cry. The naivety, the sadness of that delusion. Having Hiccup in love with another was not as bad as having him imprisoned and abused in some dark cell.

Stoick shook his head, and handed Astrid the letter. I hurried over, and read it over her shoulder.

It was short, and horribly concise.

****Stoick,****

****If you ever want to see your son alive again, then hand over Berk to Thornburg. If you do not, we will murder Hiccup and come anyway, in numbers you could not resist. If you do not answer, we will assume you want your son dead.****

****Peaeye Nadderslayer, chief of Thornburg****

* * *

><p>The cove was so empty without him.<p>

I approached it with heavy steps, tail dragging in the dirt behind me, ears drooping, and paused before I reached the edge of the rock face that sheltered the cove. I couldn't go down there without Hiccup - even though I had at last figured out the way to get over the steep sides and out. The memories were too strong.

A bird twittered, and I sighed. It could fly without a partner. I couldn't. I couldn't fly to rescue Hiccup without a partner who was willing to learn to steer me.

The trees gave way to sheer rocks, and I looked down into the depressed glade.

There was someone there, sitting with their back against the large, moss-covered rock that rested beside the pool.

It was Astrid.

As I watched, she pressed her hands to her eyes, trying, it seemed, to hold back her tears. She stayed like that for a minute or two - and then gave way, and started crying helplessly, sobbing without being able to stop, shaking all over.

I jumped down the steep rock sides, using the cracks in the stone as claw-holds, and landed softly near her. She didn't look up.

I approached her cautiously. From this close, I could see the tears pouring down her cheeks, and the way her body quivered with every sob.

I had never seen her cry before, and I curled my tail around her and wrapped her in my wings, making comforting, half-purring, half-moaning noises in my throat.

Astrid drew a shaky breath, and buried her face in my scales.

I raised her chin with the tip of my tail, and looked into her eyes.

She stared back, blinking a lot, her cheeks still flushed and shining.

I jerked my head back, motioning her to get in his saddle.

She laughed through her tears, and reached up to wipe her cheeks dry. It was crazy. It was insane. It was Astrid Hofferson style.

"We're going to rescue him, aren't we?" she said.

I nodded.

She clambered up onto my back, and I shivered with joy. There was someone else willing to give their life to help Hiccup, someone who would go with me. Someone who would learn to steer me, and learn fast, for Astrid had always been competitive, and an eager learner.

15. Chapter 14

Thank you to my reviewers! You guys rock :D I really wish I could give you a longer chapter, but I promise promise promise that the next one is twice as long!

* * *

><p>Chapter 14

"Stoick the Vast has given over Berk, on the conditions that his son be returned to him and that he be given forty-two hours to leave the island."

The words pounded in my ears. I was to be returned home â€" but there was no home left. My heart stung for Berk. Where would we go?

My thoughts were interrupted as Peaeye Nadderslayer came into my cell. The heavy door shut behind him with a deep, ominous click. He smiled a cruel smile.

"Your father is a dreamer. He wants forty-two hours â€" he is giving you time, don't you see, to escape and come back home to him. Then he would not have to give up his island. But he is never getting you back."

My heart jolted. "It was a condition! You have to give me back to my father!"

He shook his head, that ruthless smile spreading again over his face. "I am going to kill you here and now, and say, when we get to your father â€" after he has given up the island â€" that you drowned on the way to him. You fell off the ship and drowned. You can barely even walk with that foot of yours â€" how could you swim?"

I stared up at him in horror, as he drew a glistening silver dagger from his belt.

"There will be no more Horrendous Haddocks to take back the throne of Berk. Stay still, and it will be better for you â€| it will be quicker â€|"

I could not move my hands or my feet, for they were chained heavily together, but I struggled the best I could, leaning away from his brutal hands. Despite my efforts, his left hand grasped my shoulder, and he sat on my knees, restraining any movement.

I was just a child to him, easy to handle, and easy to kill.

"No! Please!" I begged. He just laughed, and forced my head back, exposing my neck.

It must have been only a moment, but each moment in that cell lasted an eternity. I don't remember what I thought at that instant. I only remember the feeling of the cold dagger against the side of my throat. Then, the dagger sliding towards me, piercing my skin, the keen edge now wet with blood. Peaeye was smiling pitilessly, his green eyes alight, and my neck was blazing with pain.

My murderer's smile was growing, and his lips were forming the words, "You are dead, Hiccup," but I couldn't hear them.

But then his smirk became transfixed â€| and then, ever so slowly, a look of horror and pain creased his brow, and he fell over forwards.

Where his face had been a moment ago stood my dragon.

Toothless had come for me.

My father had been right to gain forty-two hours â€" but one second more and the remaining forty-one hours, fifty-nine minutes, and fifty-nine seconds would have been a false hope. If one more second had passed, I would have never again breathed the air of Berk, heard the sound of my father's voice, felt his rough embrace.

It had been close. But in the end, freedom had triumphed.

Here.

But not on Berk.

Yet.

16. Chapter 15

****As told by Toothless****

****Chapter 15****

Astrid bent over Hiccup, who was lying prone on the floor, and I followed close behind her, Peaeye Nadderslayer's blood dripping off my claws. I felt not one shred of remorse. He had intended to murder my dear rider. He had deserved his fate.

Astrid reached out her hand and ran it over Hiccup's cheek.

"Say something, Hiccup! Speak to me! Don't die! Don't let it be too late! Oh, Thor, don't let it be too late!"

Her face was white as paper. Trembling, she brushed his neck with her fingertips.

I cringed slightly. His neck was covered in blood, so much that I could hardly tell where the actual wound was. His chest was heaving, but how much longer would he be living and breathing? How much longer until he lost too much blood to survive?

"Astrid," he moaned.

"Hiccup!" She gave a stifled cry of joy, but her face was still bloodless and pale. "Hiccup, oh, Thor... oh, dear Thor and Freya!"

Hiccup took a deep breath, and tried to ease himself into a sitting position. Astrid supported him, her face worried and her eyes shining with unshed tears. I resented her ability to help him, her nimble fingers and quick arms - it was my place, my place to save him, to rescue him, and she was invading it.

I shook myself. This was no time to feel envious. Hiccup was covered in blood and pale as snow - anyone willing to help him should be welcome.

Hiccup gave a shivering, gasping sigh, and settled himself with his back against the wall. He had eyes only for Astrid, he was looking at her without caring that I was here, too, here, and just as worried as she was.

"Hiccup, you should see yourself." Astrid bit her lip.

"Am I going to die?" He asked her.

She shook her head. "Peaeye obviously wanted to prolong your suffering and went for the side of your neck instead of slitting your throat directly. You're lucky, but even so—"

"Astrid," he said, fear suddenly colouring his voice. "Am I going to die?"

"I don't know," she said, her voice trembling.

I pushed past her, and came close to Hiccup. He stared up at me, his eyes terrified. I could tell he was afraid to die, not ready to leave this world.

What powers did I have? How could I keep him here?

I licked the blood away from his neck. I hated the taste, because it was Hiccup's precious lifeblood, but it was the only thing I could do.

To my surprise, Hiccup sighed with relief.

Astrid eyed the gash in amazement.

"It's stopped bleeding, mostlyâ€¦ dragons must have healing powers."

I blinked with bewilderment. I had never known.

Hiccup reached up and stroked the top of my head, and I purred with delight at his touch.

"Can you stand?" Astrid asked, and Hiccup shrugged and nodded.

Astrid offered him her hand, and he tried to stand, and fell back. I leaned down to support him, and, with my help, he pulled himself up again.

Hiccup thanked me, and then tried to thank Astrid, but she shook her head. "Don't talk." She looked at him for a moment, blinking to keep back the tears now pooling in her eyes, then threw her arms around him.

Hiccup gasped with pain as he felt the soft touch on his back, and I sucked in my breath in horror. Astrid's hands were slightly red, a few drops of blood clinging to her fingers.

"Your - your back is bleeding," she breathed.

"Yeah," Hiccup said. "Some of the scabs must've cracked when I was trying to get away from Peaeye Nadderslayer."

"Scabs? What happened? Hiccup!"

Hiccup managed a weak smile. "What happened to 'don't talk'?"

"You can't fly like this!"

"Well, do you expect me to sit around until we're caught?"

"We killed enough soldiers to ensure a few minutesâ€¦ butâ€¦ are you sure you can walk?"

"Yeah. We'd better go, before anyone raises the alarm. Find the keys, Peaeye Nadderslayer must have someâ€¦" he motioned toward the limp body lying a few feet away.

Astrid found them and unchained him.

He massaged his wrists, gently running his fingers over the places where ugly scabs had formed because of the manacles.

He went to the door. "Come on!"

"But you're hurt. We â€" "

"This is life or death, Astrid! And even if my wounds are life-threatening, I'd rather die trying to escape than be murdered in a cell."

"Just tell me what happened."

"Later, I swear. Right now, we've got to go!"

"Follow me, then," she said, and led the way out of the cell.

* * *

><p>The trip back to Berk, through the cold mountains, made my neck sting and smart, and even though we only had less than 20 hours to get back to the island, Astrid insisted we stop and that I rest for a few minutes. Even in the cold of a mountain pass I slept easily, for I was more exhausted from fright than I ever had been from physical labour. Then I drank some water and we continued on.<p>

I could not fall asleep while on Toothless. I had no fear of falling off â€" Toothless would never let that happen â€" but I had to steer and if I fell asleep we could crash, and then all three of our lives were in danger.

When the night descended about us, Astrid told me that I should land my dragon and sleep.

But I refused this point-blank. We had to get to Berk.

I kept myself distracted by watching the gorgeous northern lights dance above us, flashing green and red and purple. But in the middle of the night I could not distract myself with even sights so wondrous, and started to drift off. I kept waking myself up, but after an hour, I reached a point of utter exhaustion and slept with my eyes open. I was so used to flying that I could steer even in a state of half-consciousness. It was as natural to me as breathing. And so it was that, thirty-seven hours after Stoick had declared that he had surrendered, the golden lights of Berk came into view.

Toothless landed heavily on the lawn in front of Berk's great hall, and immediately, a stream of Vikings rushed towards us. I drew my sword, but then saw that they were friends, and sheathed it.

My father had me in his arms in an instant. I collapsed against him. He looked me up and down, and touched my blood splattered clothes.

"Is this your blood, son?" He asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"What happened to your neck?"

"Peaeye Nadderslayer came to murder me in my cell so that Berk would have no heir. He cut my neck with a knife but Toothless and Astrid rescued me â€" " My voice trailed off.

"I'm so tired. I need to sleep. How much time do we have until the forty-two hours are over?"

"We â€" we have five hours. Go into the house and rest."

"Astrid and Toothless are more tired than I am. They flew non-stop to rescue me."

"You have lost a large amount of blood, and you're injured... But I will see to them."

I nodded and tried to speak but coughed. My throat felt as dry as sand, and the little saliva my mouth had tasted of blood. When I attempted to take a step towards the house, the ground rushed up towards me. I struggled to my feet, only to fall again.

Then I felt Stoick's huge arms scoop me up like I weighed little more than a feather, and carry me towards the house. Then I knew no more.

17. Chapter 16

****As told by Kenna****

****Chapter 16****

"Vengeance."

The word echoed around the dim room, low and cold.

I looked out of the tall window I was standing beside, out onto the half-frozen harbour and frosted world. My fingers tightened on themselves, rounding into fists, turning white with the unnecessary force that they were exerting.

"He's escaped, and killed my father, you say. Then he must die. Vengeance. But firstâ€¦"

I looked up at the slave boy who had brought me the news.

"First, someone else must die." I beckoned him. "Come here."

He approached, the fortitude of a person facing execution in his soft brown eyes.

I stared him down, and after a second, he averted his eyes from my face.

"Every reign begins with death. The bearer of the bad news should be killed. Take out all the evil luck. That's what my father did, and my grandfather before him."

The slave boy looked back up at me, and defiance was in those wide eyes.

I raised my eyebrows, as if he was being unreasonable.

"But it didn't work for them, did it? They're dead now. My father had only had one child, and his wife died early."

The slave boy swallowed, and in a soft, strong voice, said, "I don't believe you for a minute, Kenna Nadderslayer."

"Then you are an intelligent boy, slave," I whispered. "Never trust a Nadderslayer."

I drew one of the daggers I wore around my waist, my favourite, with the one with the diamond hilt.

"Third time lucky," I snarled, and drove it through his heart.

I stood for a moment over the still white corpse, and then spun around, acknowledging the men in the room for the first time.
"Listen!"

I walked slowly towards the line of commanders, generals and other dignitaries who had gathered to talk to me, sidestepping the pool of blood that was growing on the floor.

"You are all clever men, are you not? You sent a slave to tell me of my father's death, because you knew I would shed the blood of any who told me that news. You've survived this long, have you not?"

The men seemed at ease, and this, coupled with the fact that the slave I had murdered had been so defiant, stirred my temper.

I walked to the oldest of the men, and held up a hand.

I drew a new dagger - I would never mix my pure blood with that of a slave - and, without a moment's hesitation, drew blade over the skin of my own palm. Blood trickled down my arm and soaked my sleeve.

"I can shed my blood easily," I said to him. "Think of how much easier it would be for me to shed yours. Think on that, general, when you wake and when you sleep, when you come and you go, and when you are around me, especially."

Raising my voice, I called, "I am a new Nadderslayer. My father was weak. There will be wars fought and won like you have never seen, riches and plunder gained that will stun the world. Serve me, and I will make our kingdom vast and prosperous. Fail me, and I'll make you regret that you were ever born! It's your choice."

There was silence.

"My first conquest," I said, "Will be the island of Berk."

18. Chapter 17

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 17****

When I came to myself, I was lying " for the first time in days " on a soft, warm bed. I was clean. I felt much better " I was not tired anymore, and my neck was not throbbing with pain but only aching a little.

Someone was pressing a spoon against my lips.

"Drink this," she said, and I recognized the voice of Astrid.

I opened my eyes, and drank gratefully.

Then I asked, "Do you have any food? I'm starving." Astrid smiled and

pressed half a loaf of bread into my hand.

I sat up, and tore ravenously at the bread. While I ate, I eyed Astrid. She looked fantastic - as she always did. The curve of her shoulders and the thick black eyelashes that adorned her wide blue eyes caught my gaze especially. She smiled slightly at me, and my lips tingled with a yearning that had nothing to do with hunger at the sight of her mouth tilting gracefully to the side.

When I had finished, I looked around the room.

"Where's Toothless?" I asked Astrid.

"He's getting armoured for the battle."

"It's come down to war."

"We always knew it would."

"Are you alright?" I asked her.

She nodded. "I'm not a bit tired anymore. There's going to be a battle" I'm excited."

I looked at my hands. "I'm not! I don't fancy the idea of killing people.

I only have to close my eyes, Astrid, and I see Peaeye Nadderslayer's evil grin. He had nothing against me. And I only have to close my eyes and I feel that dagger cutting into my skin." I shuddered. "Astrid, why did my father have to be a chief? Stoick could've been a farmer, or a fisherman. Now I have to go into battle - now I have to go to battle at fourteen. Because he wasn't. I'm not ready. I can't."

Astrid cast her gaze to the ground, thinking. I studied her delicate profile, wondering what she was reflecting on. Then she opened her mouth and pure encouragement flowed out.

"Hiccup, you are more mature than all the teens on Berk who are older than you. You of all of them are the most ready. You are the only one among them that sits and thinks instead of rushing heedlessly into the fray. But don't let that quality produce evil. Don't think discouraging thoughts about what might have been. Think instead upon the fact that if your enemies do not feel that knife on their throats then your loved ones will." Her bright eyes flashed under her hair. "If the knife doesn't go to your enemy's throat then Toothless will feel it. Or it will end up resting in your own heart, Hiccup. When you charge into battle, think of the person on the island who is most dear to you, and think on the fact that when you kill in battle, you are protecting them. Think also of what would happen were the Thornburgians to rule Berk. We would have to sail far north. Our very old and our very young would not survive the journey."

"Now, Hiccup, it is time to get ready for battle." She held out her hand to me and I took it, fresh hope kindled in my heart. I put my boot on, and my coat over my tunic.

At the forge, I could not suppress my excitement. It is always a thrilling moment when a Viking boy gets his first set of armour, and

I donned mine with pride, even though it was one of the smallest sets in the room. Astrid looked ravishing in her armour. Hand in hand she and I walked out of the hot forge into a small and empty hall of stone, cut off from the main room by several doors. We were heading for the door to the outside, but I stopped, and took her hands in mine. My heart was beating about ten times faster than it needed to, and butterflies were fluttering in my stomach â€| but not because of the coming battle.

"Astrid. Remember what you said about thinking of the one you care for most when you go into war?"

She nodded. I looked down at the stone flagged floor, then into her lovely face. Her blue eyes were shining, and her cheeks were flushed.

"Well, I want you to know that I'm going to be thinking of you. If I die tonight, I'm going to die with your name on my lips and your face in my mind's eye."

My heart was beating a hundred miles an hour, drumming against my chest. But when I looked into her azure eyes I felt so calm.

"I don't think that I'm ever going to see you in this world again. Their army outnumbers ours ten to one. So it is very likely â€| probable â€| that I won't survive. So, Astrid, can I do something I've wanted to do ever since I can remember?"

She nodded, her delicate white hands trembling ever so slightly in mine, her sapphire eyes staring up into my green ones.

I slid my hands along her arms until they were touching her back, and I could feel her heart beating against mine. And I kissed her.

It was a sweet moment, and as I felt her rosebud lips return my affection, my heart seemed to stop, and I experienced the bliss of the feeling that all the dreams I had ever dreamed were coming true. I tasted something that was far sweeter than honey, and felt thrills running down my spine. All trepidation concerning the coming battle was dispersed. If I could die for her, it was a privilege, I thought. I would give my life a hundred, nay, a thousand times for her.

She curled her arms around my neck and wove her fingers into my hair, and I felt my heart would burst with happiness. Joy filled my whole body, setting every nerve tingling.

I could have remained in that position for hours, but I had something to give her.

Breaking the embrace gently, I pulled out from under my shirt a small whistle.

"If you have need of me during the battle, blow on this, and no matter what I am doing I will drop everything and come to your aid."

She took it, and looked up at me with a smile. She tried to put it on, fumbling with the knot at the back. I stepped around her and tied it for her.

"There. Is it too tight?"

She shook her head. "It's just right."

We stood, hand in hand, for a few moments, and then I broke the silence.

"Goodbye, Astrid. May we meet again."

She smiled again, this time sadly.

"If I die in the battle, Hiccup, I'll be content." she said softly.

"So will I," I whispered.

The door opened, the cold air rushed into the hall, and she was gone.

* * *

><p>hehhehehehehehehehehehe :D So... what did you think?

19. Chapter 18

****As told by Toothless****

****Chapter 18****

I stood in the snow outside the forge, my heart beating too fast, adrenaline throbbing through me.

It was like the visions I had had when Hiccup had been in danger in Thornburg - except this time, I didn't receive images, but feelings.

I knew - somehow - in the rush of nervousness and joy, that Astrid and my precious rider had, for a moment, been close, close and more in love than they had been for months. I tried with all my might not to feel resentful. We were both young. I wished for a mate just as much as he did. I just hadn't met her yet.

We were partners, Hiccup and I, but I had to accept that Hiccup loved Astrid as well as me.

But it was difficult. Shouldn't our bond be all-exclusive? Shouldn't we be together, without reservation or qualm? What if they got married? When people asked Hiccup who he loved better, Astrid or me, who would he choose? Who could he choose, but Astrid? People would think it odd if he told them that his dragon was better cherished than his wife. Why s_hould_ he choose me? What did he owe me? How could he love me better than Astrid?

I shuffled my wings and sighed as Astrid came out of the forge and mounted her Nadder beside me. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, and her eyes had a faraway look.

I disapproved of that look. She didn't deserve him. He was too

wonderful to waste on a girl.

_ I'm not trying to say that I deserve him more, _ I thought. _Okay! Maybe I am. He and I, we were meant for each other. She's just not worthy of him._

Hiccup came out a little while later, blinking slightly in the sun.

He walked up to me, and touched my nose, and I stared deep into his emerald eyes, searching for answers. All I found in the forest-green depths was shining, glowing love. Was it for me?

He walked to my back and swung himself up, then knotted himself to my saddle.

Then came a call.

"Their ships are on the horizon! Hold the island's defences!"

looked beside me, to see Astrid smile eagerly at Hiccup.

"Once they're engaged in the front," he said to our comrades, "We will attack them from behind. They may or may not be expecting this â€" careful for arrows. We'll set fire to their ships, and fly around to the front to regroup.

Let's meet them, Toothless!"

The wind rushed under me as I leapt into the air, and Hiccup leaned against my neck. I felt the blood pounding under his skin, and my own heart beat in time to his, a rapid tempo perfect for war. And together we swooped over our home, ready to die defending it.

* * *

><p>Sorry it's short... again...

20. Chapter 19

****Chapter 19****

The mist swirled, thick and dense, concealing our hiding place. Every muscle tight and coiled, I crouched in a cleft in the steep cliff face, ready to jump forward at the slightest warning.

Below us, I could just see another dragon's head poking out from the face of the precipice â€" a dark shape, nothing more. I caught the glint of armour, and knew it was one of our group.

I opened my mouth, and called with sounds too high for human beings to hear, called the four other dragons we were with.

Hiccup tightened his grip on the saddle, as I bent over the cliff, and, leading an arrowhead formation of diving dragons, folded my wings and leapt over the edge.

The mist parted silently to let us through, and we levelled off smoothly, touching the surface of the water gently before rising

again to a comfortable level of about thirty feet off the sea.

Ship's masts appeared suddenly, looming like ghosts.

I let out a roaring jet of fire, incinerating the sails of the nearest ship, and bit at the mast with my sharp teeth, half landing as I wrapped myself around it. Then I took flight again, dragging the mast with me so that fell and made a gaping hole in the deck of the ship.

With deadly speed, I moved on to the next ship, which sunk under my attack in a matter of seconds.

I had never fought like this before. We had battled the evil Sea Dragon, whom we had conquered in the end, but here, my opponents were not bigger than me. They were easy to kill, and I revelled in my feeling of power, and the thrill of the knowledge I was protecting my loved ones with every burst of fire.

All around, the other dragons were setting fire to the enemy fleet, and tearing the ships apart. The attack had been a success, a quick, unexpected, deadly triumph.

Lifting his sword over his head, Hiccup yelled to get the attention of his friends. Together, we set off at top speed for Berk's shores.

* * *

><p>"Have they set foot on the island yet?" Hiccup asked from my back.<p>

The grey-bearded commander he had addressed nodded, and my heart redoubled its speed.

"A few ships have, yes."

Hiccup gasped. "Then we'll go and fight!"

"No. Your father's orders are for you to fly down to the shore and make sure the rest of the ships don't reach the shore."

Hiccup drew his sword.

I looked back at him. His face was set, and his dark red hair was all over his face. Ash and seawater, sweat and blood combined to dirty his skin, and the only real colour in his face was his bright green eyes, which shone with determination.

"Alright, buddy, let's go!" he cried, and I roared in response, sending a jet of fire into the air.

Unfurling my wings, I jumped into the air. The smell of smoke and salt water guided me down to the shore of the sea.

We circled overhead, setting fire to ships as we had done before, leaving death in our wake.

* * *

><p>Smoke drifted, blending with the mist that hung over the sea, and Hiccup was having trouble steering me through the murky grey. Great columns of craggy rock rose up in front of us, and though I could see them coming from meters away, not to mention use my echolocation to create a mental, three dimensional picture of our surroundings, the rock formations caught my rider by surprise, and more than once he swerved wildly to avoid them, and I caught my wingtips on the rock.<p>

The Thornburgian ships were somewhere in this fog, but the trouble was, we didn't know quite where.

I had a general idea of the location of the fleet, but Hiccup, unfortunately, did not, and he was the one in control of steering me.

I was able to guide him slightly, and I tipped my head from side to side, trying to show him the way.

Then I heard it.

The shrill of the whistle Hiccup had given Astrid.

My ears shot up.

In that split second, a boiling, seething volcano of emotion seemed to erupt in my heart. In the battle, I had forgotten my worries and troubles, but they came flowing back with the force of a tidal wave. He shouldn't go to her. He had more important dutiesâ€|

But more than that, if I let her die, it would mean the elimination of the love that threatened to choke out our bond.

No. I couldn't do it. If Hiccup loved her, then she was worth saving.

I pulled to the left. Hiccup obeyed my leading.

"What is it?" he whispered. "What's wrong?"

I only flapped harder.

The sound came again, and Hiccup sat up straighter on my saddle. "Astrid," he breathed.

The rock formations grew closer together, and the bulging shapes sharpened and became more jagged as we came closer to the place I had heard the whistle blast come from.

The whistle seemed to still be echoing around the rocks, bouncing in my ears, shivering and quivering like a fiddle's too-high notes, sending shivers down my spine. Hiccup sat upright on my back, one hand on my saddle, one behind him, hovering slightly above his sword hilt, and I knew he felt the eeriness of the place, too.

Then, without warning, a tree rose up about twenty feet in front of us, a tree hung with ragged, trailing cloth - a ship's sail.

Another, and another, and on the frayed and grimy cloths that were the sails, I saw the designs, dyed in black and green, of Nadders lying dead and dying.

A wall of sheer rock twisted upward from the grey sea, and the gaping mouth of a cave opened in the rock face, dripping and wet and better left untouched.

But the dim light of torches, blurred and hazy through the fog, shone in the black depths, and the whistle's sound, now in my memory and imagination only, seemed to have come from here.

I landed like a shadow falling on the rock face, without a sound, clinging on with my claws to the veridical wall, my wings spread to keep my balance.

Hiccup clambered off of me, and his white hands gripped the dripping rock beside me. I swung my tail up, and supported his back, and he nodded.

His green eyes flashed in the hazy torchlight for a second, then he had turned his face upward, and started to climb.

His progress was fumbling, and I helped him through most of it. Thank goodness it was a short way up... I don't think he could've managed much more when he finally reached the lip of the cave.

We peeked over the edge.

It never struck either of us that the stealth was perhaps unnecessary. There was a chill in the air and a shiver in the sea that had nothing to do with autumn or winter.

There was a brief moment when Hiccup peered over the edge without moving, and in that second, I caught a glimpse of two Thornburgian soldiers standing with their spear points pressed against Astrid's throat. Darkness shrouded the people further back in the cave, and I knew that Hiccup couldn't see anyone but the two warriors and Astrid. And I knew that even if Hiccup could see the people hiding in the gloom, he would still do the same thing.

And then he had done it. In one quick, fluid motion, he swung himself up and drew his sword.

If all my legs hadn't been clinging onto the cliff, I would've slapped a paw to my forehead. Yes, Hiccup, Astrid was in danger, but must you take the first and most obvious path? Couldn't we sneak around or something? Just because a plan doesn't occur to you right away doesn't mean there isn't one!

I followed my own advice and stayed hidden. Hiccup would need me, soon, but surprise was an element that gave the outnumbered an advantage.

Astrid gave a little scream. "Don't, Hiccup, no, it's a trap!"

One of the guards holding her gave a little snigger. "Of course it's a trap," he rasped. "It's a trap, but if you don't walk into it
_"

He pressed his spear harder into Astrid's neck, so her skin broke and a thin trickle of blood ran down.

"No," gasped Astrid. "No, Hiccup!"

Hiccup met her gaze, and she pleaded with him silently, her eyes huge with fear.

Hiccup looked away. "What do you want me to do?"

"Lay down your sword, come forward, and take the girl's place."

_ No,_ I groaned inwardly. _No-o-o_,_ don't do it, don't be a fool..._

Hiccup took a step forward, but he didn't put down his sword. There was only a split second, and then, in a smooth flash of silver and a spray of red, the two guards lay dead.

Hiccup stumbled back, as if he couldn't believe what he had just done, and then Astrid had been dragged back into the gloom of the cave's depths, and I had leapt up, and joined Hiccup, as the dark figures that had been skulking in the back of the cave surged forward.

We were surrounded.

I spread my wings and pushed Hiccup behind me, shielding him from the Thornburgians, and roared in warning.

A soldier hacked at my wing, and I pulled away just in time, and blasted the man and his companions with a blaze of fire. I whipped my tail round and caught another man in the chest, felling him. I heard the crack of breaking bones.

Another soldier tried to slash at me, and Hiccup darted forward and stabbed him.

I knew Hiccup wouldn't leave without Astrid. It was why we had come, after all. But still, it aggravated me that Hiccup would risk his own precious life to save the girl's. That was a beautiful thing about him, one of the many beautiful things, that he would put his life on the line for Astrid, but I resented it. Would he do that for me, if I was in a dangerous situation?

Of course he would. I tried to put the matter out of my mind. And it wasn't hard - men were shouting and dying all around me, and my thoughts were swallowed up by the fervour of battle.

* * *

><p>That used to be THREE different chapters! Also, the three different chapters were written months and months apart, so if they're inconsistant, please tell me.

Aha, watch me dodge the action and skip around during the first two sections... I suck at battle scenes, forgive me. :(

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 20****

Both my hands ached - my sword hand had never been put to this much work before. With every stroke, my sword felt about a pound heavier, and for every man who fell before me two new ones appeared. The only thing that kept me going was the girl I was fighting for. If I gave in, they would kill her.

_ How many men __are__ there?_ I thought feverishly, as another warrior approached, the same mad desire to kill in his eye as the rest of them had.

I averted my eyes from his own. If I looked too hard into anyone's face, if I got to know them, just a little, I couldn't kill him.

With a desperate yell, I slashed at the man, but he parried the blow and hammered down at me again. I only just managed to deflect it. Sparks flew where the metal of his sword met the metal of my shield. My reflexes were slowing, worn down by the fighting, but I managed to dispatch the man before he could react.

I shifted my position, gripping and re-gripping my sword to get a comfortable hold - if anything can be called comfortable when the sweat and blood run together down your face and into your eyes, and you are facing a gory death.

Each contest held a deadly similarity, and yet, at the same time, they all were horribly different. To just kill, kill, kill without mercy, without stopping to think - nobody with a heart comes out of that situation unchanged, and I believe it was the worst experience of my entire life. Blood all around me, but not mine. I began to feel sick with the horror of the battle. The only thing that kept me on my feet was the knowledge that Astrid was depending on me. If I wavered, she would pay.

Another soldier loomed in front of me. He raised his mace to strike, and I lifted my shield to block it. When the weapon hit the shield, it splintered it into pieces. I dodged another blow, and then stabbed him through the heart. I shook the shattered remains of my shield off of my arm with a feeling of despair. Your shield was your most important tool in a battle, I had been taught that from the beginning.

_ The end is near, _ I thought hopelessly. _I can't keep this up any longer._

I hefted my sword again; preparing to close with what I was sure would be the last foe I would ever face. Toothless took him out with a single blast of flame, and I stumbled backwards.

Silence.

I blinked, and looked around. The cave was quiet as the grave. I couldn't see anyone skulking in the darkness.

"Toothless?"

My voice was cracked and broken, and escaped my lips as a raspy whisper, but he heard, and shook his head.

I closed my eyes, bit my lip, and let the tears seep from beneath my eyelids. At first, they were tears of relief and thankfulness for the deaths of all the ambushing men.

Then they changed to tears of agony and despair. I had killed them. Killed them. _Me._ _I_ had done it.

I opened my eyes, and pushed the matter to the back of my mind. I had more important things to do.

I began to pick my way through the corpses.

To this day, the experience gives me horrible nightmares. The pale, gore-splattered faces of all those men, staring with eyes like glass and mouths that hung open, devoid of breath, filled with blood. But I kept going, walking through them, and at last I was rewarded.

I fell to my knees beside a girl who was also splattered with blood, but whose chest still rose and fell, whose neck still beat with a pulse.

"Astrid?" I said, leaning close to her.

And at that moment, somewhere distant, I heard the retreat being sounded - a faint blast on a horn, repeated once, and then again.

So we had lost the battle.

Astrid's eyes fluttered open, and she took a deep breath. Her lips shaped my name, but she didn't seem able to say anything else.

I lifted her gently to her feet, and supported her in the brief walk to 'Toothless' back, helping her into the saddle behind me. Toothless took off, and we set out for Berk.

22. Chapter 21

****Ugh, another short chapter :(And, to make matters worse, it's told by Kenna! And it's a FILLER chapter! Oh my goodness! Okay, I'll upload the following chapter, like, now.****

* * *

><p>As told by Kenna Nadderslayer

****Chapter 21****

"How did they escape?"

I fought for control of my voice - anger threatened to flood it.

The soldier I had addressed shook his head wearily. He was wounded, and had blacked out, and thus, thought to be dead, had survived the massacre of his comrades. "My lady," he said, and his voice shook, "My lady, the Night Fury was with them."

"And you've never killed a dragon before in your life!" My voice rose to a crescendo. I turned. "Why, why didn't you kill it? Does it matter what species it is?"

"My lady, you underestimate the dragon, both its fighting skill and its loyalty to the boy. We shouldn't have expected him to come alone, and it was -"

The man fell to the floor, clutching at his throat. He thrashed for a moment, then lay still, and I stepped over the body, knife dripping, seething with anger. It was pathetic! One dragon and one small, weedy boy shouldn't be able to kill upwards of thirty men.

I clenched my fists, and turned back to the body that lay on the rough floor. What had the soldier said? It was because of - _the dragon_? Had he no shame! Defeated by an animal, a dumb beast killed for sport? One might as well let yourself be conquered by a deer, or a bunny rabbit!

Night Fury, ha! If a dragon could befriend a boy like Hiccup, then that dragon is nothing to fear.

The boy would pay for this, the boy, and his precious dragon. They'd pay a thousand times over.

23. Chapter 22

****Plot twist! Hahahahahaha!****

* * *

><p>As told by Toothless

****Chapter 22****

When we arrived in the village, men were pouring in, withdrawing behind the city walls. Many were wounded, and numerous men supported comrades who were not fit to walk.

Blood pooled on all sides, and all faces bore grim horror.

Hiccup was quivering on my back, gripping the saddle a lot harder than was necessary, his sporadic breathing interrupted now and again with a swallow that seemed to stick in his throat for too long.

As soon as we were safely behind the walls, Astrid told us hurriedly that she was going to find her father. She was still out of breath, but had recovered with that amazing vigour characteristic to Vikings.

She started to slide off of my back, but caught herself and kissed Hiccup on the cheek.

I looked back, to see Hiccup looking, if possible, more dazed than before.

Astrid started to run off, but then she stopped in mid-stride and turned awkwardly. Her right hand held her axe, so she reached across

and put her left hand on my nose. "Thank you," she whispered. I snorted in acknowledgment, and she nodded jerkily and dashed away.

Hiccup just sat there for a moment, completely frozen, but when I started towards his house, he resisted.

"No," he said. "I need to find my father, too. I just thought of something. Why did they sound the retreat? Were we just hopelessly losing? Or â€" was someone injured? Someone important? Stoick?"

He clambered off my back, stumbling a little in his fatigue.

He stood with his arm on my neck, hesitating. He let the first few soldiers pass by, and then stopped one who was unladen and looked uninjured.

"Where's Stoick?" he asked.

The man looked at us with drooping eyes for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't know."

Hiccup nodded, and turned to another warrior.

He tried four soldiers with no luck. From the fifth, we got the answer that the man had seen Stoick alive and well about ten minutes before the retreat had been sounded.

Hiccup breathed a long sigh of relief, and laid his head against my side, closing his eyes. I spread my wing out to fondle him, and he sighed again. "Let's go get some rest."

We started out across the village, but halfway there, a large soldier with a grey moustache and a worried expression blocked our way.

"Hiccup! Thank goodness I found you!"

Hiccup leaned forward. "What's wrong?"

"You're needed. Immediately. Follow me, please."

The man turned and started up a narrow alley.

I followed, a sense of foreboding growing inside me.

The man led us through side alleys and backstreets, winding between the buildings. Again, Hiccup was gripping my saddle harder than he needed to.

We stopped in front of a red painted building sandwiched between a rotting stable and another house. I recognized it as the healer's home.

My sense of mounting doom escalated.

Hiccup swallowed hard, and sat in indecision for a moment, then slid out of the saddle and went inside.

All the furniture in here was driftwood, carved intricately. A few

strings of shells and beads were draped among drying fish hanging from the ceiling, and crab claws and bits of other dead shellfish lay on a small table. The place was overgrown with clumps of moss, which crept along the walls and the ceiling, and smelled pleasantly of damp wood and washed-up seaweed.

A door was ajar at the furthest end of the room, and Hiccup stumbled forward, and pushed the door further open.

The room was crowded with men, who stood around a bed in the corner, muttering amongst themselves.

Hiccup pushed his way through them, and I looked down, knowing what he was about to see, and not wanting to share the sight.

I heard a long, shaky breath, and looked up in time to see Hiccup sway, and crumple to the floor, his face hidden in his arms, leaning against the side of the bed. The bed in which Stoick lay, white and still.

A few men tried to help him up, but Hiccup stayed, his head in his hands, his shoulders shaking slightly.

"Leave me," he whispered.

* * *

><p>Uh-oh :D

24. Chapter 23

****Before we begin, I want to say a BIG thank you to JustBlossom and Zoe Alice Latimer. Seriously, without you guys, I would have like two reviews. You're so generous with your time and praise and constructive criticism. Thank you!****

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

****Chapter 23****

The clouds were grey and low, and the sea was deep green, with the white foam gathered on its sullen surface highlighting the jadelike colour.

I stood on the edge of the dock that jutted farthest out into the sea, staring with unseeing eyes at the choppy water.

Stoick lay beneath those waves now, where he had always been destined to go.

Fire and water, death and life, black-green and white, dragons and Vikings, hate and love... they swirled in my head, chasing each other in endless circles.

The people who had gathered to watch Stoick's funeral ship sink beneath the waves were splitting up and moving off, but I stayed where I was, rooted to the spot.

"Come on," someone said, but I stayed still.

Astrid slipped behind me, soft as silk, and put her arm around me, whispering, "I know how you feel. Stay if it'll make you feel better."

She didn't understand, I thought numbly. After this, there was no feeling better. They were empty words, words that only came true when you fell ill and woke cured. They were never true after death.

Death drains life.

I was dimly aware of Astrid's touch sliding off my shoulder, and the voices of the people who had attended the funeral muttering meaningless words of sympathy, then moving off and fading into the crash of the waves and the cries of the seabirds.

My eyes burned. I longed to curl up and sob my heart out, but that was not the way of a leader, not the way of a chief. Stoick had told me before. A chief feels no pain. A chief feels no fear...

But I was afraid.

Someday in the near future, I would lead an army to their deaths. I would be captured and tortured slowly to death in Thornburg, or else Kenna would finish the job of slitting my throat from ear to ear that her father had started.

Because the man who now lay beneath the heaving green waves was my one and only hope for survival and new life, my one comfort in the confusion of life.

The one person who protected me. True, he had hardly ever shown affection to me in the way other fathers did.

But he had been my father.

And he was no more.

And at this thought, the burning fire of hopelessness overcame me, melting the tears I had held back so fiercely, thawing the stiff muscles in my legs so that they weakened and lost the strength to hold me up. I sank to the ground, aware that my face was drenched and that every drop that dripped off my chin would be counted as cowardice and childishness. But that didn't matter to me - the only thing that did was that he was gone, gone, gone forever, lost in the abyss of death.

Deep, gasping sobs incapacitated me. I had never before cried this hard or this desperately.

I lurched forward, fighting for breath, hands over my face.

My chest heaved as more tears ran down my cheeks and splattered the wood of the pier I knelt on. I could hardly breathe, it was as if I were drowning, drowning in terror and agony and despair.

And I had killed him, I realized, kneeling there, utterly wrecked. The moment I had put down my knife and cut Toothless' ropes, I had

doomed Stoick - doomed us all - to the retribution of the Nadderslayers.

"Oh, no, please no," I whispered through my tears.

"No!" It was a sob, a sob of misery and desolation, and my tears came faster and thicker, until I thought I would choke on them.

There was a soft movement by my side, and Astrid knelt down and put her hand around my shoulders.

I hated myself for showing such weakness in front of her, and turned away.

She shook her head.

"Cry all you want, Hiccup."

I stood, but my legs would not support me, and I crumpled beside her.

She put her hands on my shoulders, and pulled me close.

I put my arms around her, and somehow, I found comfort in her murmured words. I sobbed into her shoulder, and the terrible burden of pain and hurt seemed to lighten with every tear.

Behind my eyelids, the light faded and grew pitch black, but in my fear and torment, I did not wonder at it.

I began to calm a little, and Astrid put her lips on the top of my head, and whispered, "Shhh," very softly, like a mother soothing her child. I drew a deep, shaking breath, my lungs still aching. My tears slowed, and I felt as though my broken heart was very slowly knitting itself back together under her gentle touch.

I swallowed hard, sat up, and brushed my cheeks dry. I'm â€" I'm sorry," I said in a quivering voice.

"No," she said. "No. Don't be sorry. You've done so, so well. You deserve a rest." She pulled me gently back, until I was once again pressed against her soft body.

I let out my breath in a long, trembling sigh, and closed my eyes.

I lost track of time â€" it could've been hours, or only minutes, but the slow, steady rhythm of Astrid's fingers caressing my hair, the constant, never-ending beat of her heart, and the soft, regular sound of her breathing lulled me into a trance that soothed my aching soul.

I became aware of another sound, like rain hitting a taut piece of material, and when I opened my eyes, I realized that the darkness that surrounded us was actually Toothless' wings, folded to shield both of us from the driving rain that was now falling.

I looked back at Astrid, and she gently wiped a tear away from my eyelash.

"Astrid," I breathed, desperate for the answer, for her soft voice to

assure me I was wrong, "It's my fault he's gone..."

She gasped. "No," she said emphatically, "No. It's Kenna Nadderslayer's fault. You had nothing to do with it."

"If I had been there -"

"You couldn't have done anything. If Stoick was overwhelmed, you would've been, as well."

For a few minutes, I was silent, and then I drew a deep breath.

"I killed them," I whispered, "I killed the men who were guarding you at the Thornburgian cave, I killed them, they're gone, too. What if they had friends? Family? Sons, daughters, people who-"

Astrid laid a slim finger on my lips. "This killing isn't anything like Toothless. It isn't like deciding to murder him instead of letting him go. I know that's what you're thinking - what if you had let them live? This is war, Hiccup."

"The war on the dragons was the same."

"No. That was pointless hatred, year after year. This is self-defence."

I nodded, and sighed. "Thank you," I said, my voice still shaky from the tears.

She put a hand on my cheek, and I put mine over it, lowering it and clasping it in both of my own hands.

"I -" I want you to -" know something," I stammered. "You and Toothless are the only ones I have left. I'm an orphan. I'm friendless except for you two. And I want you to know that -" " I choked on the words. "I love you," I whispered. "I love you both so much. If anything ever happened to you, I think I'd die. Stay safe. For me."

Even in the dim light, I could tell she was blushing.

She moved jerkily towards me, and kissed me on the cheek. "I will," she said.

* * *

><p>Taada! The end!
NO! I'm JUST KIDDING! There is tons more :P**

Sorry for forgetting update for a few days - my bad :(

25. Chapter 24

Oh and last time I forgot to mention **Tagesh****! You rock too! Thank you for all your reviews!**

Thank you to EVERYONE. Again :)

So - do you want the good news or the bad news first?

****Upside of this chapter, the good news, is that it's really long.
And I used to be proud of it.****

****Bad news is that I'm not very proud of it anymore, and that Hiccup
gets all eloquent again. :/ Ugh... *shame*...****

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

****Chapter 24****

After an uneasy night's sleep, Toothless and I trudged up towards the Great Hall.

Toothless left me partway through the village. It had been days since he had hunted properly, and he needed a meal.

It had frosted in the night, and I rubbed my arms for warmth, as I watched him scamper into the trees.

I reached the door to the main room of the Hall, but stopped with my hand on the cold doorhandle.

I could hear men talking. That wasn't a surprise â€" Stoick had always met with his advisors in the morning, and I assumed that it would be the same now I was chief. But I caught a sentence, and then stopped to listen.

"The boy will get us all massacred. Stoick was stupid to marry that flimsy little girl â€" her son is just like her â€" weak and small."

"His mind works just as well as his mother's, though."

"Perhaps. But there are others who would make better chiefs."

"Maybe we should just give him a chance."

"A chance? One mistake with that cursed army camping outside our walls, and we're all dead. We have to do what's best for our tribe."

The second man mumbled something, and I pressed my ear to the door. I was too late though, I didn't catch it.

The other man replied. "No. No! If we were in any other situation I might consider that. But not here. He cannot be the chief."

"What do you suggest, then?"

There was silence for a moment.

"Murder." It was a whisper.

"End the line of the Horrendous Haddock? No! No! Never!"

"Do you trust me or a crippled, weakling boy more?"

I clenched my fists. A cripple! A weakling! The words rang in my head. So that was what they thought. Well, I'd prove them wrong.

There was another silence. Then "â€"

"When?"

"When he's asleep."

"No, that wouldn't work. That dragon sleeps with his wing over himâ€"

"What's to stop us killing the dragon?"

"Don't be an idiot. That dragon's a Night Fury! You don't just kill a Night Fury. Do you remember when we first saw it? He was rescuing his master from a Monstrous Nightmare. And he just â€| just ground it into submission. Within a few seconds! And if a Nightmare's scared, so am I."

"Coward."

"No. No, I'm not!"

"I was a dragon fighter for forty years before that idiot boy stopped the bloodshed. One of the best, if I do say so myself. And so were you. We both know exactly where you can stab a dragon for a quick and noiseless death. One quick cut behind the ears, just where the skull joins the neck. And that Night Fury would never wake up. Then we lift the wing, or cut through it, and get the boy through the heart. Then we go back to sleep. In the morning, we feign horror, and no one will suspect us."

My heart beat violently against my chest. Assassins.

I opened the door, just a crack. And I saw them. Two men. They were my father's best fighters. Both had known me since I was in my mother's womb. And now they were planning to slaughter me and my best friend.

I put my hand on my sword hilt, and pushed the door open.

I walked to the table where the men sat, keeping my footsteps as even as I could. That comment about my being a cripple had cut home, and I was determined not to prove him right by limping.

I sat at the table, not at the large chair at the end, but on one of the long benches, where I had always sat before. I did not swing my legs over it, though. I kept them free, ready to spring up.

Down the hall, there were many more men, sitting around a map. I assumed they had not been involved in the plot, and turned my attention to the two men beside me.

"Good morning," I said. My voice was warm, but as I spoke, steel crept into the words. "I suppose you've seen many like it if you've been killing dragons for over forty years, but I still enjoy them. I'd better enjoy this one especially, as I hear it's my last."

I almost wasn't fast enough to block the man's axe, but I managed to stop him from decapitating me. The heavy shaft struck my keen blade, and with a thunk, embedded deep into the wood. I pulled my sword back, and by the action, dragged the axe from his grip. I flicked my sword, and the axe buried itself in the wood boards at his feet. The second man was upon me before I had freed my blade, and I ducked to avoid his mace. As soon as I could swing my sword I did, and, more by luck than skill, cut off his hand. He fell to the floor, doubled up in pain, and I knelt swiftly down and put the edge of the blade against his back.

I looked up to see the other conspirator struggling wildly against two men who had been sitting at the table a little way down and had now come to my aid.

Sweat beaded my forehead, as I remembered the feeling of bones and muscles giving way under the razor-sharp metal. It was too easy to ruin and mutilate human beings. Too easy.

I stared at the blade of my sword with revulsion. Why did we make things that could cause so much damage?

I glanced over at the end of the last table. Many of the men were on their feet, staring at me.

I looked down at the man I had my sword against again. "Why? Why did you want to kill me? I've known you for years. And now you plan to stab me through the heart without a second thought. Why?"

He did not reply.

"You know you'll die for this, don't you?" I asked.

"Aye."

"Don't just give in! Don't you have any excuse? I don't want to kill you! Give me a reason to spare your life! Please!"

The man shook his head. "I deserve the worst for scheming against you. Kill me."

I shook my head.

The two men who were holding the other plotter were looking at me expectantly.

I jerked my head at one of them, and he came over to me.

"Take them away," I sighed.

"To execution?" He asked.

"Noâ€¦ put them somewhere where they won't escape."

I turned away, clenching my fists.

_ Why, why, why!_ My thoughts howled around inside my skull. _Why should I let them off?_ _I'm weak, just like Kenna said. Weak!_

I looked towards the last table, where all the commanders sat or

stood, gaping at me.

I started to walk over to their table, attempting to keep my strides even, as I had before.

I came to the end of the benches the men were sitting at, and stood there, looking at them all, waiting for someone to say something.

What a great first impression that must have made, I thought bitterly.

I felt lightheaded and my vision went black for a few moments. I closed my eyes, and put a hand on the table to steady myself.

A voice sounded. "What happened?"

I opened my eyes.

"I came to the hall after I woke up. I was about to enter the room when I overheard those two plotting to murder me. I went in, and revealed that I knew of their plans. They attacked me. I defended myself."

I sat down. Everyone was staring at me. I wanted to know what was going on, but it wasn't the sort of environment where you just say, "What's up?"

I rubbed my eyes. When I opened them again, all eyes were still riveted on me.

"Well don't just stand there gawking! Tell me something useful. How many fighting men do we have?"

The question seemed to take the commanders by surprise. The oldest one stuttered for a moment before answering. "About two hundred."

"Against?"

"That's the problem. Out there, camped beyond our walls, are upwards of a_ thousand _men. And half our warriors are too old or too young, while their men are strong."

I tipped my head back. A full thousand.

I looked into the eyes of each man at that table in turn, stopping at the old commander.

"What was the largest number of men you ever killed in battle?"

"I don't keep count, my lord," he said, in a cold voice.

"Was it more than five?"

"Do you mean to insult me? A seven-year-old could kill five men in battle."

"An exaggeration that would be extremely helpful if it were true. Can any of you divide?"

"What do you mean?"

"Divide, as in math, the opposite of multiplying," I said impatiently.

"Of course."

"Well, what's ten divided by two? The answer is five. If every soldier in our army kills five men, they'll be none left."

The men exchanged looks. "Many warriors are killed before they can even kill one man."

"And many warriors kill more than five people."

"My liege, will every Thornburgian man try to fight?"

"Don't be stupid."

"Well, only one in every five Thornburgians will have to use their skill as a warrior if they want to obliterate us." He rubbed his eyes, and muttered,

"May evil fall on every Thornburgian man, and every Thornburgian's son. Every one of them is out there right now. Thor knows, we could use depletion of their forces —" or at least a few more men on our side."

"Don't wish even one more man!" I spread my hands. "People will talk forevermore of how an army of three hundred flattened an army five times larger. Do you want to tarnish that glory, by lessening the odds? And if we die, we die in glory. We will be remembered. The men of Berk, sitting around this very hall in years to come, will tell their children about us." I laughed. "Their families will be hooked on their every word, as they explain how we fought with numbers so vastly different! The children will be inspired!" My voice grew more grave. "And if we end, let us make such an end to be remembered. Let us make it so that the Thornburgians will whisper in awe for decades, for centuries, about our feats. How we refused to die, enduring all pain. How we bravely went out to face them, rejecting cowardice! How we thinned out their numbers, till they were ready to surrender. How the ground was littered with Thornburgian princes and nobles. How they had to kill every last man, for the warriors of Berk never surrendered. How they returned with a tenth of the force they left with. They will recall the weeping of their orphans and widows more than they will remember the weeping of ours! For the side that has more men can lose more men."

And you needn't be afraid that they will boast how much the Chief of Berk cried out and begged for mercy. I will die with you, and if I cannot, then I will die there without staining our name.

And if you are still too afraid to face the men who threaten to murder your wives and children, then I will be ashamed to fight by your side. You can leave, now, if you are so pathetic and traitorous as to betray the ones who trust you. Get out, if you have no courage, and are willing to put a foul blot on the name of Berk. I will stay here, and no matter what happens to me, I will never run away."

One of the men drew his sword. I tensed, but he slid off the bench and knelt, turning the weapon so that the hilt was facing me.

"Your words could convince a rabbit to fight a Sea Dragon. And under your guidance, I believe the rabbit could win. I now pledge to serve you unwaveringly, as long I shall live. I offer you my blade and my fealty."

I took the sword, and placed the tip on his head. "Rise."

He stood, and I returned his sword to him. "Thank you. After we have driven away the Thornburgians, you will be remembered as the man who first stepped forward, and never forgotten."

I looked at the others. "Who will follow me into battle, and who will run and hide, and leave their loved ones to become slaves to the Thornburgians?"

They all drew their swords, one by one, and pledged themselves to me, until only one was left. The old general.

He stared me in the eye for a full minute. I stared right back. Human's eyes were easy to look into without blinking, compared to a Night Fury's. I didn't give in, and he finally broke the eye contact and looked down. I leaned forward, and said in a low, deadly serious voice, "I promise, that as long as I live, no one will lay a finger on the women and children. As long as I live, no army will set foot in these walls. But I need you by my side!"

He looked up, and scrutinized my face again. He then drew his mighty battle sword, and offered me the hilt. It took all my strength to lift it.

He said, "You are the son of Stoick the Vast and the grandson of Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the second, whose reign I also saw. I am putting my trust in you, and if you betray that trust, you will pay dearly. I'm giving you one chance."

I grasped his hand.

"I _swear_ I will not let you down."

* * *

><p>Blame Shakespeare.

26. Chapter 25

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 26****

That night, I hardly slept. I remembered what the men had said about stabbing my dragon, and half out of fear and half out of protectiveness I lay awake.

But I no matter how I tried, I couldn't keep my eyes open, and I drifted off.

The thoughts of violence, and my terror of the coming battle, made my one dream horrible.

It was vivid â€” the most real dream I had ever had.

I was standing on the highest point of Berk's highest pinnacle, looking down on the island. Fire was consuming the village beneath me. With the assurance only a dream can bring, I knew that it was dragon fire.

I stood watching for a few minutes, and was just about to turn and leave, when a whistling shriek tore at my ears. I looked up, and a blue flash blinded me. I covered my eyes, but it was over already.

Night Fury!

I turned, and realized that a girl was standing beside me.

She smiled a wolf's smile, and I realized that it was Kenna Nadderslayer.

She took my hand, and led me down through space and time to a little clearing in a dense forest.

We knelt behind a boulder for a second, and then she pushed me out into the open. I stumbled, and when I regained my balance, I was face to face with a Night Fury.

We stared each other down for a few seconds, and then I felt Kenna's hand against mine. She pressed something into it. I looked down, and saw a dagger.

"Do you know how many of your friends this Night Fury killed?" She asked, her poisonous voice seeping through my ears and into my soul. "And the ones he didn't kill directly, he helped other dragons to kill. Think of it, Hiccup!"

I stayed frozen, staring at the downed dragon in front of me.

"Remember Freya?" Kenna asked craftily.

I looked up.

"Freyaâ€¦ I know you remember her. This dragon did it, Hiccup! The poor girl was just beginning to grow. You liked her, didn't you, Hiccup? Didn't she hold you on her lap when you were only two or three years old? Remember how she disappeared? No one ever told you what happened to her, did they? You were too young! You could just imagine. But I assure you that it was worse than your most awful fancy.

And there were others, weren't there?" She leaned closer until she was whispering into my ear. "Weren't there, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third? Does the name Connor ring a bell?"

I wanted to scream at her to stop, and I opened my mouth to do just that. But no sound would come, no matter how I tried.

"Connor â€" the only friend you ever had, right, Hiccup?"

I wet my lips, still trying to tell her to end her horrible monologue.

"Yesss," she hissed. "Connor. Dead before you were seven years old! And let's see if you remember Erik? You used to look after him. He was the only person who could bring out the nurturing love that was buried inside you. Just a baby when that dragon got to him, wasn't he? Just beginning to crawl? You never met anyone who you loved so, did you?"

I felt tears starting in my eyes. Of course I remembered Erik. The wound his death had dealt my heart had never healed.

"That dragon did it all," she said. "Kill him! Avenge them! He deserves to die!" Her voice ran to a high crescendo. She was spitting out the words like a snake would.

I fell to my knees and crumbled in on myself.

But then, with a flash, we were in a different place. It was the dragon-training arena where my tribe had tried to force me to kill a dragon. And here I was, facing a Monstrous Nightmare, the same knife in my hand.

"Do it!" Kenna hissed.

And then, in another flash, I was holding a Terrible Terror. I just had time to take it in, when I was beside a Nadder.

I found my voice then. "Stop," I cried. "Please, stop it!"

In another flash, I was facing the same Night Fury. I turned my face away, and I felt tears running down my cheeks.

But then I realized that I was in my own room, looking at Toothless, sobbing for no apparent reason into thin air.

I drew a deep breath and leaned against Toothless' side, but I couldn't stop the tears from flooding from my eyes. I had suppressed the memory of Erik, buried all my pain deep, deep down. But Kenna was right. A Night Fury had been with the attacking dragons that day that Freya had vanished. And a Night Fury had demolished the house that Connor had been staying in.

A Night Furyâ€|.

A Night Fury had saved my life countless times. A Night Fury had kept the whole tribe from being wiped out. If the Night Fury hadn't been there, many, many more Vikings would've died. Toothless had paid his debt.

I rolled over and fell into happier dreams.

* * *

><p>Another filler chapter... and sort of a backstory bit... and ... Idk... should I have cut it?

27. Chapter 26

****Sorry for the delay! I had computer issues.****

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

****Chapter 27****

That morning at breakfast, the old general approached me, and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Now that you've been crowned chief, I have something for you."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I can't tell you," he said. "It's something I have to show you. Follow me."

And he led me out of the Great Hall, around the side of the hill, till we came to a small door set in the rock face. He took a lantern from the hook beside the door, lit it, and proceeded into the room.

I followed him cautiously.

My eyes took a moment to adjust to the dim light, but when they did, I was disappointed. I had been expecting a dragon horde of jewels or _something _like that, but all I saw on the rough stone walls were shelves of rusty swords and battered shields.

"What _is_ this place?" I asked.

"An old armoury," replied the general.

"Why have you taken me here?"

"To give you this," said the man, and turning to face me, he held out a magnificent sword, sheathed in a fine leather scabbard.

"Wow," I whispered. "Where did you get that?"

"It was Stoick's, may he rest in peace, but he never used it, not once. And now it's yours."

I hesitated for a second, then reached out my hand. My fingertips tingled when they touched the hilt. The tingling spread to my whole hand when I wrapped my fingers around it more tightly.

I put my other hand around it, and, with one smooth motion, drew it from its sheath.

I felt my heart skip a beat, and then start pounding furiously against my chest.

I tilted the sword, and the lantern light flashed on its smooth, polished surface. On a sudden impulse, I lifted it high, and slashed

downwards, then parried an imaginary blow, spinning to the right.

I hardly noticed that I carried a sword. It was as if it was part of me.

I hefted it again, and threw myself into a series of complicated attacks and counter attacks, which culminated in a lightning-fast stroke that severed my invisible opponent's head. I stood, frozen, for a second after the backswing had reached its highest point, chest heaving, gasping for air, but feeling so alive that I could've sworn that if I had jumped into the air I would've been able to fly.

Endeavour. The word rippled through me, deep and solemn. "Endeavour," I whispered. "Its name is Endeavour."

"You were made for this blade," said the general in a soft voice. "And this blade was made for you."

"How could it be?" I asked. "The blacksmith who forged it didn't know me, did he? It was before my time, if it was my father's."

"It wasn't the blacksmith, Hiccup," he said, and reaching out slowly, and touching the golden band that circled my forehead. "It was destiny. You were always destined to have this sword."

"How could Stoick have not used it?" I asked in disbelief. "It's perfect. It's light. It's speedy. It's beautiful."

"If it seems light and speedy and perfectly balanced to you, it doesn't mean that Stoick found it that way."

I shook my head, and sheathed it with a twinge of regret at the sight of the gleaming blade descending out of view behind the glossy leather. "You're joking. I mean, I'm his son. There has to be some other reason he never carried it into battle."

"You're right," the general said. "Look." He pointed to the intricate carvings etched onto the scabbard.

I traced them slowly with my fingers. "What are these?" I whispered. "They're notâ€|?"

"Night Furies," the general said.

"How?" The word was spoken with reverence and awe.

"Many have studied Night Furies, Hiccup. You were the first to see one, yes â€" in the daytime, clearly, close by. That doesn't mean that others â€" obsessive dragon killers and gifted carvers â€" haven't noted the shape of the dragon's wings and tail through their lifetime of seeing it for split-seconds against the blue of its own fire."

It seemed so momentous that an unknown blacksmith had forged a sword perfect for me and decorated its sheath with Night Furies â€" the dragons I held a special place for in my heart â€" that I could hardly take it in. But these carvings had nothing to do with my father, did they?

"And this is why Stoick never used it? Cause it had dragons on it? That's ridiculous. All his other swords had Nadders or Gronckles or Monstrous Nightmares on them."

"No, Hiccup. Not because it had dragons carved on it_. Because it had Night Furies carved on it_. The only dragon species that had ever escaped his clutches. His number one failure. He didn't want to carry this sword into battle, because it reminded him that he still hadn't captured, tortured or killed a Night Fury."

I shivered.

"And," the general continued, "That's why no other Viking chief has ever used this blade since it was forged."

"Surely they would just throw away the sheath, and keep the sword?"

"No." The general drew the sword, and handed it to me, and I saw that, circling the rubies on the hilt and the blade, were more Night Furies, that I had not noticed before.

"This sword really was made for me," I said wonderingly.

"Or you were made for it," said the general.

"Or I was made for it," I repeated. I looked down the shining blade, and shook my head regretfully.

"What's wrong, my liege?" asked the general.

"I don't deserve this sword," I sighed. "I don't deserve the tribe. I don't deserve this crown." I touched the golden circlet on my forehead.

The general shook his head, and laid his huge hands on my shoulders.

"You were meant to be a chief," he said firmly, each word resonating in the underground chamber. "You were meant to be our leader. Just like you were meant to have this sword."

I looked down. "I don't know."

"Hiccup, look at me." He knelt down, but it wasn't to be on my level, as if I was a child, but more like he was paying homage to me. "You were created to be a chief. You will defeat this army." He took up the sword belt and sheath, and handed them to me. I buckled them on.

"And," he said, his voice growing ever more solemn, "You will outdo your father in deeds of greatness."

"No!" A sudden, cold sweat had sprung up on my forehead. "No, I won't. I can't. Please. I'm only a boy. I'm just a boy."

"You are an extraordinary boy," he said. "You've already surpassed him. You've already changed the course of history, don't you realize that?"

I looked down. "I guess. But I was just being me. I wasn't tryingâ€"

"That's the point, Hiccup," he said. "Be you. Just be you."

And with that, he stood, and left me, standing there, uncertain and confused.

* * *

><p>Alternate ending: "To give you this," said the man, and turning to face me.

blank silence** "This is a pen."**

It is a powerful weapon," the man said. "Only use it in times of severe distressâ€|

***This is a PEN!" I yelled.**

Yup. It's okay if you don't get the jokeâ€| if my past self from when I originally wrote this was reading this, she wouldn't have got it eitherâ€|

28. Chapter 27

Warning: ROMANCE! :D :D

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

Chapter 28

I headed out down the road, through the village. Toothless joined me, and together we walked down the main street. I hated how everyone stopped what he or she was doing as soon as they saw me and watched me.

Finally we arrived at our destination - at the door of a house carved with blue dragons. I knocked.

The door opened immediately, and a pretty Viking woman stood there, staring at me.

"Can I talk to your daughter?" I asked.

"Astrid?" The woman called, although her eyes never left me.

Astrid came down the stairs behind her mother. She saw me and grinned. I smiled in return.

Astrid came to the door, and joined me. Her mother turned away and went inside.

Astrid shut the door behind her. "Come on," I said, and swung myself up onto Toothless' back. I held out my hand to help her up, and she grasped it, and settled herself behind me.

As Toothless took a short running start, and leapt into the air, Astrid put her hands on either side of my waist, and held on to me. A tingle ran down my spine.

"So, what's up?" She asked.

"I have to talk to you," I replied.

We were over the woods in a minute, and Toothless landed in the small clearing where I had first befriended him.

Astrid and I dismounted.

We sat on top of a huge rock, side by side, watching Toothless hunt for a while.

Then she turned to look at me. Now that the time had come, I didn't quite know what to say. It seemed odd, odd to just blurt out what I felt I had to tell her.

Looking straight ahead, I opened my mouth to speak. My tongue was dry, and I felt nervous, even though there was nothing to be afraid of.

"I promised you I'd tell you what happened in Thornburg."

She started. "Yes."

"Do you still want to know..?"

She nodded, but I found I couldn't speak. The terror of the place, the cold and the damp and the helplessness, seemed to be seeping back into my skin. To speak of it would only strengthen the power of fear.

She seemed to know what I was thinking. "You could - just show me," she said in a small voice.

I nodded, but made no move.

She put a hand on my cheek, and turned my face towards her own.

I tried to smile, but couldn't quite manage it, then drew away, and shrugged off my coat, turning so she could see my back.

Astrid gasped, and I felt a trembling hand caress my skin through the gashes in my torn shirt, following first one scar, then the other.

"H- how?" her voice was so soft I could hardly hear it.

"The Nadderslayers aren't fond of guests," I said bitterly. "If I put one toe out of line - if I refused to eat, or resisted them in any way - they flogged me. Not enough to kill me, never that - they enjoy playing with their prisoners too much to kill them."

Astrid looked up at me with tears in her eyes.

"Why don't you wear something that's not torn?"

"It hurt too much, at first," I murmured. "And after it healedâ€¦ I just didn't want to think about it."

I turned back to her.

"Astrid - we're going to lose the battle."

"What?"

"There isn't any chance of our victory," I said. "They have a thousand men. We're not going to make it - any of us."

She bit her lip, and I drew her closer. "Astrid," I whispered, "You can't fight in the battle."

She pulled away. "I knew you were going to say that," she said, and her voice was sharp and angry. "Just because I'm a girl, just because -"

"It's not because you're a girl," I said, and she raised her eyebrows, daring me to continue talking. I said nothing.

"Why is it, then?" she asked, her voice still angry. "What's your excuse? You've just told me we're outnumbered. Why don't you want an extra warrior?"

I shook my head. "It's not like that -"

"Listen to me, Hiccup -"

"No, you listen to me!"

I stood. "I can't lose you. I can't fight when I know you'll be killed. I need to be strong, strong for my people, the people who are counting on me, and I can't be if you're in danger."

I took her hand again, and lifted gently her to her feet. "Please," I whispered.

She looked up at me. "All right," she breathed. "All right. I'll do it."

"You won't fight?"

"No."

"I have your word?"

She hesitated, then nodded, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

"What about you?" she said.

"I have to lead, and I have to fight."

She looked up at me, and I was shocked to see a teardrop glistening at the edge of her eye. "But then I'll never see you again," she said, and her voice trembled with tears.

"Ah, well," I said, "What loss is that? With me gone, you'll be able to find someone who actually deserves you -"

She threw her arms around my neck, and for one glorious second, I knew what she was going to do, and then she had done it.

Her kiss was the most wonderful thing in the world. When our lips met, a burst of fire exploded in my soul, swirling in my stomach, consuming my heart with ease.

I still knew that death and agony were imminent... but somehow the truth seemed pale. The future had no hold over the present. Things to come were nothing compared to the taste of sweet warm honey that her lips brought, and the feel of her smooth hands on my arms.

Worries that had tortured me a few minutes before melted before the soft brush of her eyelashes on my face.

Nothing mattered besides this: she loved me, and I loved her. I could feel her tears sliding down my own cheeks, we were so close.

She drew away, and, with a feeling of reckless abandonment, I put my hand on her cheek and kissed her again, falling ever more in love with the feeling of her gentle arms around me, and her smooth face pressed against my own.

Our lips came apart gently, slowly, tenderly, both of us savouring the luxury of lingering a moment longer in the bliss of first love.

And then it was over. Reality crashed back onto me like an unbearable weight, and tears sprang up in my eyes.

Astrid curled her arms inward and huddled close against me, head on my chest. I wrapped my arms around her, and laid my cheek against her hair.

My voice trembled as I said, "This is my last chance to tell you â€" I love youâ€" I love youâ€" I broke off. How could I express myself? It was impossible to tell her of the feelings I had for her â€" to try to put them into words was a futile endeavour.

"I would've asked for your hand in marriage," I murmured.

"I would've said yes, Hiccup," she whispered. "Yes, yes, forever yesâ€"|"

And then she started to cry â€" deep, desperate sobs that wracked her whole body. I had never seen her cry before, and a lump rose in my own throat at the sound of her desolation.

"Shhh." I ran my hand over her back. "Don't worry."

"Don't worry!" Astrid choked. "You're so worried about me, when there's only a small chance of my death, that you forbid me to fight! I _know_ that when we lose, you'll be killed!"

"Don't cry. Don't cry."

Despite all my efforts, she continued to weep. I tried to be brave for her, I tried to keep back my own tears, and I succeeded, even though I was even more frightened than she was.

I cradled her against me, until she had cried all her tears.

Astrid's tense body relaxed slightly against me, and she pulled away a little.

She cupped my face with her trembling hands, and ran a hand over my hair.

"The last timeâ€¦" She whispered, her voice shaking. "I don't want to ever forget this face. I swear, I swear I never will."

But then her face crumpled again. "Do you have to go?"

"We're Vikings â€" it's an occupational hazard."

She drew in her breath sharply. "You know your dad said that, don't you?"

"Yeah." I realized that tears were running down my own face now. "I'll try to live up to his name."

29. Chapter 28

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 29****

I dropped Astrid off at her house, and then Toothless and I flew back to the clearing.

I sat under Toothless' wing and planned the battle, scratching marks in the ground to represent various parts of our force, and thinking of Astrid, and the soft touch of her lips against my own.

It began to snow, but Toothless' wings shielded me.

It wasn't until Toothless shifted behind me, and breathed a long, hot sigh, that I realized who it would really be that I would miss most.

I turned, and met with the piercing, cat-like gaze of Toothless' huge eyes.

I hadn't thought of what would happen to him when we lost.

I put my arms around his neck, and buried my face against him.

When I tried to swallow past the huge lump in my throat, I choked and my tears spilled out onto my cheeks and off my chin.

When I drew back, I noticed that his smooth scales shone, not only with my own small tears, but also with large droplets, hot to the touch.

Then I looked up at Toothless and saw that his eyes were shining more than usual.

Then words, not my own, broke through the barriers of my mind. Either it was a situation where I was so sure of what Toothless was thinking that I knew the exact tone and dimensions of the thought, or else Toothless was actually speaking into me.

_ Alone,_ he said, his voice mournful.

_ What?_ I thought.

_ Alone,_ he said again, with more intensity, as if he had been able to hear my question. _Without you, without me. If one of us goes on while the other stays. Alone._

_ No!_ I shook my head. _If you die, I'll follow soon, whether from grief or the sharp point of some enemy's sword._

He blinked.

_ If you die, I won't need an enemy to finish me. Misery and isolation will do it faster._

For a single second, the connection flashed stronger than ever before, and then it drew off, until it was no more than a glimmer, like when someone gives you a tight hug, and then turns away.

I wrapped my arms around him again, and he folded his wings around me.

His scalding tears landed in my hair and on my face, steaming when they met my own.

* * *

><p>I sat on Toothless' back, running my fingers along the hilt of my sword, watching a man approaching from the Thornburgian force.<p>

The snow blew in thick drifts over the open field, and the man waded through them as if they were water.

"A messenger approaches, my liege," came a cry.

"Bring him here," I said. Perched on Toothless' back, I could see the man exchange a few words with the guards at the village gates, and then three soldiers of Berk led the man forward.

"What's your message?" I asked him.

"Are you the chief of Berk?" He asked me.

"I am."

"My chieftainess bids you surrender, before we obliterate your men and blood and gore lie ankle deep on the ground."

I slid off Toothless and drew my sword. I put the point on the messenger's chest, and growled, "By tomorrow morning, the ground will not be ankle deep in slaughtered men but knee deep. And if all those bodies are men of Berk then we shall deserve our death! But I trust that lifeless Thornburgians shall surround us wherever we fall. We

will never give in! Go! Tell whoever sent you that I defy her! And then, if you have any sense of self-preservation, run, run until Berk is out of sight, or else you shall breathe your last before dawn!"

The messenger gave a hurried bow, stumbled backwards a few steps, and then began to openly run away from our force.

I nodded, and remounted Toothless.

_ I've let Kenna know what I think of her. Now I have to get to my troops to feel the same._

I took a deep breath, and let emotion flood every part of my body. Defiance. Courage. Protectiveness. I let another passionate wave flow through me, and then summoned words. Words.

I twisted in my saddle.

"Hear me, men of Berk!"

They fell silent.

"Death!" The word rang out across the men, and a ripple seemed to run through them.

"Death!" I shouted again. "We go to our deaths. But we go willingly! We go for our mothers and aunts, our sisters and daughters! We go because we're holding onto something. The Thornburgians have nothing to hold onto, but the empty promise of charred and desolate land. They have nothing! They die without purpose. But we die with determination and resolution! Death!"

The men roared, and words flowed through me again. Just two.

"Let's go!"

* * *

><p>The battle is coming!

30. Chapter 29

Sorry - forgot to upload yesterday...

* * *

><p>As told by Toothless

Chapter 30

I stood on the edge of the field of snow that was shortly to become a bloody, ruinous plain, Hiccup on my back.

The Thornburgian soldiers were too far away to make out their faces, but the flash of sunlight on weapons and armour was clearly visible.

The day was cold, and muddy ruts gouged the surface of the white

ground with streaks of frozen filth.

Hiccup looked back at the men that were gathered behind us. I knew he was searching every face for fear, and I knew that he would find it.

The men were of all shapes and sizes â€" old and young, large and small. Only a few of them were actually the proper fighting age. The rest were like my rider, just boys, or else they were old men.

And though they were Vikings â€" brave, courageous Vikings â€" only a handful of them had no apprehension of the coming battle.

Hiccup turned back to the Thornburgian troops, and took a deep gulp of air. "It's like the world is holding its breath," he whispered to me. His voice sounded small, and his breath smoked like a dragons' with the cold.

Then he drew his sword. The slithery scraping noise of impending doom and death rattled in my ears and shivered under my skin, lending speed to my heart and making my blood seethe and boil.

Hiccup took a deep breath, thrust his sword into the air, and yelled the war cry that he had been taught since he had been in his cradle. At the sound, my wings unfolded and caught the air, and we were off.

The other dragons followed immediately, screaming their battle cries ever louder. I flew with them for a few minutes, then landed and ran on the ground so that we could lead the men at the more deliberate speed that humans travel at.

The cloud of dragons approached the Thornburgian force, and I could see the men quail at the overpowering sound of their roars. They hated and feared dragons, and at the scream that issued from fifty bloodthirsty reptiles they turned slightly pale.

Hiccup and I fought as one. From time to time, we would fly, but it was risky because of arrows and we mostly stayed on the ground. This time Hiccup fought beside me, making sure he wouldn't replicate last time's accidental separation by staying close to my left wing as a rule. When Hiccup grew tired he sat on his back, loosing arrows here and there.

There's something about battles. As a dragon, I was used to bloodshed, and it didn't disturb me like it did Hiccup. And when I was fighting, I forgot all my unease, and cast aside my fear. When we fought side by side like this, I never considered for a moment that Hiccup loved me less than he loved Astrid. And that was bliss in and of itself, the weight, the care, lifted from my shoulders. The worry, gone.

I began to notice a Monstrous Nightmare fighting near us. Its rider was not one of the elite â€" he was a man with a nose like a potato that had enlisted in the dragon force just two days ago. He was desperately trying to get Hiccup's attention. I say desperately not because he was trying futilely for a long time, but because of the look of ravenous eagerness that twisted his features.

Hiccup acknowledged him with a nod.

"Please, sir, follow me!" He cried, and then urged his dragon into the sky.

It was not an odd request, and his intensely hungry expression had caught our attention. Hiccup clicked his foot down, and I shot into the air after the Monstrous Nightmare, spinning to make a more difficult target for archers.

When we had gained sufficient altitude to discard the fear of arrows, I levelled out, and Hiccup called over to the man, "What's wrong?"

"I have to show you, sir," he replied. "It's not something I can tell you. You wouldn't believe me, for one."

"Try me," Hiccup laughed, but the man shook his head.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I want to show you."

Hiccup nodded. A feeling of puzzlement glimmered in the back of my mind for a second, and I knew that he was too wondering what was going on.

And my own sense of curiosity was growing ever more eager as he led us over the battlefield and over the forest.

"Just beyond here," the man called, and his dragon dove.

Hiccup and I followed him, and we landed in a small clearing that I wouldn't have noticed if he hadn't led us to it.

"What is there here?" Hiccup asked, looking round at the black trees.

"Follow me," said the man again, and there was a note of ravenousness in his voice that intrigued me.

He stepped past a dead tree, and brushed back a few bushes. Hiccup followed cautiously, and I trailed after him, sniffing the air.

There was something not quite right. My nose twitched, and I was about to try to communicate my unease to Hiccup, when the man turned, quick as a Nadder, and grabbed my rider. Before either of us could move, he had hit Hiccup over the head with the pommel of his sword, and put the shining blade to his neck. It takes a long time to say, but it was over in a second.

Hiccup slumped forward and would've fallen, but the man held him upright.

"One move, dragon, and the boy is dead."

I couldn't breathe, let alone move. Hiccup's eyes were closed, and he hung limply in the man's grip. His head was tipped far back, and the naked blade of the sword pressed against his pale, vulnerable neck, eager for blood, lusting for death. It was just above the deathly white scar that Peaeye Nadderslayer had given him, taunting me with the threat that that ghastly deed might be completed.

"Now," the man said, "If you don't want me to kill him -" he gave Hiccup a little shake - "Then you will follow me, and surrender to whatever we decide to subject you to â€" injury, imprisonment, death, whatever it is."

I lowered my head in submission, terrified that I might sound the death sentence for Hiccup without meaning to.

I chanced a look up, and again my eyes met with the awful sight of Hiccup's unconscious form clutched in the grip of the murderous soldier. The sight caused an overwhelming surge of anger and horror to rise in my soul, but I kept myself in rein. The sword under Hiccup's chin made sure of that.

Wake up! I pleaded with my mind, but Hiccup made no move.

"Follow!" the man barked, and started to walk farther into the trees. I trailed after him, fury seething in my chest and fire flickering in my mouth.

31. Chapter 30

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 31****

I gained consciousness slowly. My head throbbed, and the side of my face felt bruised. Injuries that I hadn't thought about for a long time smarted once again â€" every whip cut on my back was stinging, and my neck was burning, the line of pain following the knife wound I had received in the dungeons of Thornburg.

I opened my eyes, and found that I was standing slumped against a tree, my body bound to the trunk with thick ropes that pinned my arms to my sides and cut into me like knives.

I struggled against the ropes, but they held firm. I realized that the man who had knocked me out was grinning down at me, showing rotten teeth.

"Traitor," I whispered to him. "You shouldn't have brought me here."

"Duty, and all that," he said mockingly.

"No," I replied. "Because under me, you would've been well treated and fairly judged. If she lets you live, you can be sure that you'll be the lowest slave."

He opened his mouth to speak, and I shook my head. "She won't reward you. Whatever she promised you, it's a lie."

"You have the deceitful tongue of a serpent, boy," growled the soldier. "I have half a mind to ask her to let me kill you myself."

"Don't! For your own sake, don't."

"Coward," He whispered.

"No," I said, even more quietly. "You're the coward. You'll die alone, under the banner of another chief. I die under my own tribe's colours." I tipped my head back. "Do it," I said. "Cut my throat. The shame will be yours."

"It's happened before," he said, something like wonder creeping grudgingly into his voice, and I knew he was looking at the white scar that marred my neck.

"Yes," I said softly. "Peaeye Nadderslayer did it. But he made the mistake of trying to prolong my death. Are you, a man of Berk, so twisted as to place your mark beside his?"

"Yes," he hissed, and drew a knife.

"That's not your place, Bjorn," came a voice. "Obviously, you need some instruction in how to handle prisoners."

The voice sounded angry, but underneath the chords of anger ran a delighted note, and I immediately recognized the edge of excitement. It was the twisted, brutal pleasure that the Nadderslayers had in their voices when they had just done some horrible violence, or were planning a murder, or had just helped bring about suffering.

I looked up, and with a shock of horror, saw Toothless lying near me, his eyes closed, his wings folded tightly against his body. Thick ropes circled him, restraining any movement.

Kenna Nadderslayer stood beside him.

"Toothless!" I cried. "What have you done to him?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. We're saving it for later, of course," Kenna grinned.

"My pay, my lady?" asked my would-be killer.

I shook my head. What an idiot. He got Kenna mad, then distracted her from her pleasure, and then asked her for favours. I had already had doubts about his chances of living, and the odds sank all the way down when I heard his hopeful voice.

"Yes," said Kenna. "You deserve quite a lot for deceiving your chief and subduing his dragon. And before, when you saw Hiccup kissing the girl and later brought her to me. Betrayalâ€¦ threatsâ€¦ and your brute strength is coupled with an intelligent mind. You ought to haveâ€¦" she closed her eyes and seemed to be counting up his deeds.

Then her eyes snapped open, and they were burning with rage. "Well, I would kill you for disloyalty, even if it wasn't to myself. I would also kill you for dangerous mind. Obviously treachery has already grown in your imagination, and if I let you get away with it, it might mean a rising up against me."

Two burly Thornburgians seized the man and held him as Kenna continued. "You see, Hiccup was right. You're the coward. You were

willing to attempt murder on the same person as one of your deadly enemies. You were willing to sell your chief and your land for a vague reward. Well, I can't use people like that." She snapped her fingers. "I've said enough. Take him away. I have unfinished business here."

She watched the man being led away, then turned back to me.

"Now, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, I want to show you what the real pain in war is. You see, it's not getting hurt or killed yourself â€" it's watching others, the ones you love, be hurt and killed."

A lightning bolt of terror rushed through me, setting every hair on my body on end.

She watched my expression change with a smug smile. "I've frightened you, Hiccup. I've found the gap in your courage. Thornburgians don't have that weakness. We don't love anyone besides ourselves."

I struggled furiously against the ropes that held me back. "No, Kenna, no!"

"When you threaten people who pretend to be brave, they might stand up to you. But lay one finger on their loved ones, and their confidence drains in a moment. It works like a charm."

I pulled against my ropes more fiercely, but it was useless.

She drew a sword from the sheath at her waist, and, graceful as a hunting lynx, put the blade to Toothless' chest. He struggled again for a moment, and then, seeing it was futile, gave up and lay inert.

* * *

><p>Ahhh - this is not a very good story...

32. Chapter 31

Sorry for late update! :/ And the short chapter... I'm so bad...

* * *

><p>As told by Toothless

Chapter 32

I twisted in my ropes, trying to see, trying to catch a glimpse of Hiccup, trying to escape the dagger, like a shard of ice, that was pointed toward my chest. Hiccup was crying, I could hear him sobbing and struggling, screaming for Kenna to spare me, begging her to let me live. The sound caused my heart to beat faster - I couldn't listen to Hiccup's desperate, panicked screams without a feeling of terror rising in my own heart.

"No! Please! I'll do anything! No! _NO_!" He was pulling wildly at his ropes now, I could feel the lines of pain where they were cutting

into him along my own forelegs and chest.

Kenna laughed, and thrust the sword into my body, between my ribs. But before it had gone an inch, she drew it back out.

I squeezed my eyes closed and gritted my teeth with silent agony. I let out a soft gasp, but my breath had been taken away so completely that I had none left to roar with the pain.

Hiccup whimpered, seemingly with torment of his own, or perhaps in sympathy and fear for my fate.

Kenna laughed, fingering the dripping blood oozing down her blade, and raised it again.

"No!" Hiccup cried. "Kill me instead!"

She laughed again and struck, deeper this time.

I roared, and let out a stream of fire that guttered into nonexistence on the bloody, snow-covered ground.

Hiccup gave a scream, and for a moment, I thought it was simply a shout of fear and anger. But then a new cry, a raw cry of pure agony rang out, and I knew that he was not simply scared for me, but in pain himself.

Kenna turned to him.

"You felt those, didn't you?" She said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he ground out through gritted teeth.

"This!" she growled, and drew her knife and put it to my throat. The feeling of icy metal shivered along my scales, but she didn't cut me. The cold was enough.

"Yes," Hiccup cried. "Don't hurt him, please don't."

She appeared to think for a second. "Can you feel this, dragon?" she asked, and, grabbing Hiccup's wrist, gave him a sharp, shallow cut across the palm of his hand.

I moaned slightly and curled one of my claws. It was as if the cut was on my own hand.

"It appears you two can feel each other," Kenna said delightedly. "I wonder how it would feel for one of you if the other was killed? But we can't waste this chance. We could have some real fun with this!"

"Are you a coward, Kenna Nadderslayer?"

The words were pure fury, and somehow, a shudder of joy coursed through my veins at the sound. And in one clear moment, I realized what my own blindness and the pain of my wounds had kept me from realizing before.

Hiccup loved me. Loved me more than any other being on earth. Loved

me like I loved him. He and Astrid didn't share a bond so deep they could feel each other's heights of emotion. He was speaking in my defence, panicky with the sight of my wounds, but strong in our shared love. Somehow, when you write the words, or speak them, or retell them in any way, it sounds boastful and presumptuous of me to be feeling these things.

But I knew it was true.

"You sit here hurting my dragon," Hiccup said, and his voice was strong and wrathful, "But your real quarrel is with me. Release me and face me like a real chieftainess. Duel me!"

* * *

><p>Annnnd, thanks to all my reviewers. The story is drawing to a climax, and we all know closes come after climaxes. You guys have been amazing, your input priceless, and I will be re-reading all the reviews and advice if I ever decide to re-write this story... 'cause it needs a re-write. THANKS AGAIN :) No story lives unless there's someone to listen. You guys listened. And my story lives. Wow. Thanks :D

33. Chapter 32

Short again. I'm sorry :(

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

Chapter 33

Kenna's eyes burned, and in that moment, I hated her more than I had ever hated anything in my whole life. Her green eyes, glowing with the pleasure of inflicting wounds and ruining lives, her knives, covered in green-black dragon blood and the bright red blood of humans. She was pure evil, through and through.

"When you lose, I get your kingdom," she said.

"_If_ I lose," I said, "I won't be around to protect it anymore, will I?"

"And, when you lose, I can bring you home as a prisoner?"

"_If_," I repeated.

"When you lose, Berk is mine, you are mine, the dragon is mine, and your people are mine?"

"But, if I win," I said. "You agree to complete and unconditional surrender. And, if you decide to duel me, you cut Toothless free."

"Why should I duel you if I could just slit your throat right were you stand?"

"Because," I said, "A true warrior doesn't kill her enemies while

they are helpless."

"You have your standards of honour, but does that mean I have to comply? I don't think so."

"Kill me then. Tell everyone at home how you captured Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third by cowardly trickery, rejected a chance to show your power, and murdered him while he was tied hand and foot. Tell them how he never had a chance to draw his sword! A child could stab me right now, but only a warrior could defeat me once I have my blade in hand."

Kenna glowered at me for a moment, and then said, "But what if I decide to lie, Hiccup? Tell me what would happen then! Maybe I really did duel you! Maybe I really did defeat you in fair combat â€" it depends how you look at it!" She drew her knife.

"Maybe," she continued in a softer voice, "you were injured in the battle before I even captured you. Maybe â€" there was nothing I could do about it, see â€" maybe you lost your fighting hand. Maybe you were blinded. What could I do? Was it so much loss of honour that I happened to get to you too late, and some _unknown_ soldier had already maimed you?"

My insides turned to ice. Behind Kenna, Toothless gave a whimper and struggled against his bonds.

"But nobody saw me get injured, did they?" I said desperately, frantically trying to dissuade her and knowing it was hopeless. "There will be people who know you are lying."

"I can dispose of them. I shall execute every man on your island, and take the rest of the people for slaves, and nobody will ever think to contradict me! They'll all believe that our duel was fair and correct, that we were both as sound as could be expected, given the _conditions_ â€" I mean, you were fighting hard long before you were captured."

She considered me for a moment. "How were you injured? Tell me again." Her eyes brightened. "Oh, yes! I remember. You lost a finger, didn't you? Such a pity. Or was it two? I seem to remember two were gone."

She leaned toward me, and took my left wrist in her cold hands. Smiling wickedly, she singled out my index finger and my third finger from the rest and put the blade of the knife against them.

A thrill of horror shot through me, and cold sweat broke out on my forehead. I tried to curl my fingers back into a fist, but her grip was like iron.

She considered for a moment, and then raised my fourth finger as well.

At this action my terror grew, but a new emotion had taken over, and I hardly noticed how frightened I was. I was angry. Rage burned in my heart. What right had she to disable me and then finish me off? Who was she to take away more of my physical ability, when I already had less than most people?

"Do it then," I said. "Do it and remember your whole life that you couldn't defeat me without giving me a disadvantage. Do it and let me haunt you for the rest of your life as the one enemy that you couldn't bring yourself to fight. Do it and know that you were too cowardly to duel any opponent who was more competent than a young boy with only one foot and half the fingers on his sword hand!"

"Ah, yes, I was forgettingâ€¦ you're already a worthless invalid."

Toothless growled and twisted in his bonds, desperate to get free to defend me.

Stay still, buddy â€" there's nothing you can do, I thought, and he calmed.

Kenna stepped back, surveying me.

"Untie him, and give him back his sword."

* * *

><p>Ending line sound familiar? "Now untie him, Wormtail, and give him back his wand." Yes, I copied it. Bad me. I don't really own it. I just love it.

34. Chapter 33

****As told by Toothless****

****Chapter 34****

Immediately, Hiccup fell to his knees beside me, only to be roughly pulled away by a Thornburgian soldier.

He was handed his sword, and he buckled it on slowly, looking longingly at me.

"Let him go now," he said, turning to Kenna.

She laughed. "Be glad that I gave you your life and your health for this duel, and don't go looking for bigger favours."

"You said you would," he said, angry.

"I said nothing of the sort."

"It was a condition, and you know it."

Kenna smiled and shook her head.

Hiccup screwed up his face in concentration.

_ How many ropes would you need me to cut in order for you to break free?_ The question echoed in my mind, and I knew it was Hiccup.

I sent him the blazing, tingling sensation on my tongue, and the bursts of trapped fire that couldn't escape from my body, and burned me from within.

Hiccup nodded, ever so slightly.

Kenna smiled again, and turned for a second to clean her sword.

Quick as lightning, Hiccup dove toward me, and with one clean cut, severed the cord that held my jaws together.

The Thornburgian soldier pulled him away again, this time even less gently, but the damage was done – the rope was broken.

I waited until Hiccup had stumbled out of the way, and then surrounded myself in a blaze of fire, welcoming the warmth on my dirty, snow-dusted scales. It burned the remaining bonds off instantly, and I lunged for Kenna.

"No, Toothless!" Hiccup cried. "Don't!"

I backed away, and Hiccup put his hand on my nose.

"Now, Kenna Nadderslayer, I have you at my power. And I will prove that I keep my word. We will duel, still, and I won't let Toothless kill you, though even now I can feel his thirst for your blood coursing through my own body. Get ready."

Then he muttered, "Toothless, you can't come between us. If she defeats me, then you can't stop her from killing me."

I growled.

"No, you can't!" Hiccup muttered, his voice low and fast. "I have agreed to the terms! You'd better not move." He gave me a sharp look, and then turned to face Kenna.

35. Chapter 34

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 35****

I reached for Endeavour, and my fingers tightened on the familiar hold. I slowly drew the sword. The sun flashed on the tip of the blade, then shimmered down the entire length. It ended in a single red flash as it caught on a ruby in the crossguard.

I gripped the hilt with both hands, and took up a fighting stance.

Kenna drew her sword. The hilt she curled her fingers round was bright, brilliant blue – Nadder blue. As it slid out of the sheath I saw that patterns of twisting dragons were etched into the blade. It was a one-handed weapon – lighter and faster than my two-handed sword, but with the disadvantage of the inability to deliver heavy blows. It was a girl's sword, but that didn't mean it wasn't dangerous. In fact, I thought, considering it, it was perfect for duels. Not so good as mine in the unrestrained heat of battle, but better for one-on-one fights to the death, like this.

"This is Siguard," Kenna said, quietly. "This is the sword that will end your life." She raised it to her lips and kissed the shining, carved blade.

I swallowed. My throat had gone dry.

Kenna stood, posture completely relaxed, for a moment, and a thought that had never crossed my mind dawned. _Gosh,_ I thought. _She's â€"pretty._ I kicked the idea aside. _Even if she were as alluring as a Valkyrie, I'd still have to kill her._

Then Kenna tensed. It was a tiny motion, just a split-second before she struck, but it gave me warning.

Her sword whistled through the air, and I deflected it. It skidded off mine, sending a shower of sparks onto the ground.

Kenna stumbled backwards. _There is some advantage to having a heavy sword, then,_ I thought, and struck. She staggered again, but regained her balance, and slashed at my head.

I raised my sword and blocked the blow, then immediately went in for the kill again. I closed in on her, and again, and again. We were two performers in a deadly dance, our twisting bodies linked, then torn apart, then linked again by two shining sheets of metal, one shining red, and one shining blue.

Kenna gained a step, stabbing towards my heart. I parried the blow easily, and swung my sword to the left, nearly cutting her, but she blocked it at the last second. My sword felt like a living thing, and the clash of metal on metal rang in my ears. Kenna attacked again, this time aiming for my face. I let the sword carry till the last moment, then leaned forwards and ducked under it, immediately straightening and whirling around, stabbing at her chest.

The edge of Endeavour struck the flat of Siguard's blade, carving a narrow groove in the steel.

I drew Endeavour back again, trying to get past her defences, but she lunged forward, sword extended.

I tried to sidestep the blade, but was too slow to completely avoid it. I felt a searing pain across my arm, and cried out in agony. Hot blood trickled down my elbow, to my wrist, and off my fingertips.

Kenna laughed. I felt a tingling shiver run down my spine at the sound. It was a mocking defiance of my pain, a symbol of pleasure and amusement.

I concentrated all my energy on my next blow, a sweeping downward arc, like the sudden swerve that an attacking Night Fury always makes. Kenna wasn't ready for it, and she raised Siguard just in time to save herself. The force of the blow ran through the swords, and into my hands and arms, and my sword bounced away from the contact with such force that it took all my strength to turn it back to Kenna.

I did not laugh as I felt the powerful sword dig into my enemy's flesh and bury itself in her bone. I did not laugh as I saw her fall

to her knees, teeth clenched together. I stepped back.

She cried out in agony, and pulled herself back up. Her left leg was a bloody mess. The pain seemed to give her strength, though, and she closed in on me with a ferocity that she had not had before. It wasn't long before she succeeded in injuring me again.

Kenna Nadderslayer was the best swordsman I'd ever faced. I felt like every other time she tried to hurt me, she achieved her goal, and dealt me wounds that sapped my strength. My arm soon became a single voice in the chorus of misery that tortured my whole body.

That fight seemed to last forever. I parried blow after blow, but I couldn't keep it up ceaselessly, not with the wounds I had received. I began to taste blood in my mouth, and my hand and arm grew sorer and sorer every time our swords met.

There was a moment where we both were so drained that we just stood face to face, staring at each other, neither of us moving.

But then she struck again. I groaned, and tried to block the slash, but I had counted on her aiming higher, and caught her blade very low on my sword. It slid downwards, and took the skin off my knuckles.

It was a very minor injury, but it felt like the last straw. _However this ends, it ends here!_ I thought, and threw myself at her with the sort of energy that you only get when you see the finish line coming.

I struck, and then again, and then again, each blow heavier and heavier. She hindered them all, but the fourth time the sound of steel on steel rang out, Siguard fell from her fingers. I put the blade of my sword to her neck.

I stood, frozen, acutely aware of every nerve that throbbed in pain, every hair on my body prickling.

I took a deep breath, and pulled back Endeavour, but I couldn't bring it down.

My hands shaking, I stood, torn between my heart and my honour, for a moment.

"Coward." The words were slow and expressionless. Kenna stared up at me from under hooded eyelids.

"Are you going kill me?" Her tone was mocking.

I fought for control over my raging feelings for a moment. I imagined driving the blade into her neck, and a storm of vivid memories choked me.

"And become like your father? Like you? No," I said. "I'm not."

She gave me a contemptuous glance. "I always knew you were too weak to take a life."

"It is not cowardice to show mercy, Kenna Nadderslayer. You will return with me as a prisoner of war. Your army will return to

Thornburg and disband."

I sheathed my sword.

Kenna remained kneeling on the ground, seeming to be struggling with herself.

Then she raised herself to her feet, her bloody sword held in one hand.

She looked straight at me - and her gaze held me.

I will never, to my dying day, forget the look in her eyes.

The green depths had hardened, glazed, as if the soul inside them had already died, and they were hooded in defiance.

Then something flickered - a shadow, a play of the light on the emerald surface of her eyes - her thick black eyelashes fluttered in a blink - and the spell was broken.

I bit back a cry and jumped backward.

In one fluid motion, horrible to watch and impossible to forget, Kenna Nadderslayer had fallen on her own sword.

I turned away, eyes closed, sick to my stomach, hating myself for causing that shameful death. For no matter what an act of bravery and defiance suicide was supposed to be, in the end, it was awful, horrible, disgusting, at the same time both pitiable and revolting.

But for a Nadderslayer, what else was there to do? Defeated, denied the victory, she had escaped shame the only way possible.

I ran a hand over my eyes, trying to forget to horrible snakelike motion...

The slithery, scraping, metallic sound of a sword being drawn shivered into my ears, and I spun around. It was too late. Every single one of the Thornburgians were now drawing their swords and brandishing their spears.

My heart pounded for a moment, and then I felt a surge of pain. I cried out, and then Toothless was beside me.

I jumped onto him, and he took off, soaring high above the Thornburgians.

I slumped forward. Somehow, every beat of Toothless' wings sent a lightning bolt of pain through my chest. My head spun. I couldn't think clearly - my mind was drifting in darkness. I sensed that I was about to lose consciousness, but I was beyond caring. To my vacant mind, if I fell to my death, it didn't matter.

Toothless landed clumsily, and another shock of pain rocked me. I slipped off him, oblivious to my surroundings, and landed, sprawled, on the damp ground.

The wet grass tickled me, shedding dewdrops onto my face. I drew a

deep breath, my lungs aching, and the smell of new life and breaking dawn refreshed me.

With all the strength left in my broken body, I turned over, so that I lay on my back. Through fast-failing eyes, I saw Toothless stretched out beside me, green-black blood staining the heather on which he lay. Then night, riding on inky wings like a deathly dragon, overcame me, and I lost consciousness.

* * *

><p>It's not done... not yet...

36. Chapter 35

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 36****

I woke to the sound of a soft voice, humming a gentle tune, and the feeling of warm blankets. I kept my eyes closed for a few seconds, just listening.

I opened my eyes half way, and the effort took all my strength. "Astrid?" I asked.

"Can you hear me?" she said.

"I guess."

She broke into a smile, a happy, relieved smile. Slowly, she curled her fist, and gently touched it to my shoulder.

"That's for scaring me out of my wits, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third."

"That was a bit of a pathetic punch, Astrid," I said, smiling in return. "I hope that's not going to be true of the next part of the deal?"

"Of course not," she said, and moved closer. Her cheeks shone â€" I could tell that she had been crying. I put a hand on her cheek, and she laid her hands on my shoulders, and kissed me gently.

I shivered with joy, and my stomach did a backflip. My aches and pains seemed to recede a little, and I felt comforted and soothed.

Pulling softly away, she asked, "Do you hurt anywhere?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Everywhere."

Suddenly my eyes snapped wide open, and I tried to sit up. "Where's Toothless?"

Astrid pushed me gently back down. "I'm not supposed to tell you until you feel better."

This did nothing to boost my confidence, and I resisted her touch, trying more than ever to raise myself. "Is he alive?" I gasped.

"I don't know," she said.

I let myself fall back onto the pillows, and lay completely still for a moment, concentrating all my power. I had never tried this before, and it might not work " but I had to know.

I focused on Toothless, and almost immediately, I felt a throbbing pain in my chest that I had not had before. My arm stung with pain.

I opened my eyes. "He's alive, but he's not doing well."

"What?"

"Well, my " our " _his_ wing is gashed and " "

"You can feel that?"

"Yes, I think so," I said, sitting up. "I mean" I don't have any cuts on my arm right here" I pressed on the spot where Toothless hurt. "It's him, then. And I don't have any stab wounds here" I pushed on my chest, where Toothless was torn open. I shuddered. "It's not good. It's really, really bad, actually. The cut is gaping, and it's started to bleed again."

"But you just said you didn't have any injuries there."

"I don't. Toothless does."

"But you haven't seen him! How do you know what his wound looks like?"

"I can feel it, if I want to."

I flopped back onto the pillows and closed my eyes. "Someone's down there with him, right?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The healer."

I opened my eyes again, and shivered.

"Her hands are cold."

-000000000000-

I slept for a few hours, and woke to find Astrid gone. I sat in my bed for a few minutes, feeling helpless, then opened my door and crept down the hallway and halfway down the stairs. I felt like a

naughty child who could be caught eavesdropping, but I couldn't bear not knowing my companion's fate another moment.

I saw the healer, bent over Toothless, shake her head and sigh. Even though a fire burned in the corner of the room, I turned cold with dread.

She touched Toothless' wound, and I felt a stinging pain erupt on my chest. I moaned.

She looked up, wiping her hands on her cloak, and with a shock of horror, I saw that they were covered in black-green dragon blood.

I scrambled down the rest of the stairs to kneel beside her.

I tried to catch her eye, but she was carefully avoiding my gaze.

"Is he going to be alright?" I asked.

"I can't say that," she sighed.

My heart stopped. I started to tremble involuntarily.

"He's going to â€¦ die?" I choked out.

She slowly nodded. "There's nothing we can do for him."

"There's always something!" I said in desperation. My chest felt tight, so tight I could barely breathe.

She shook her head again, and stood to go. "I will come back. Soon."

"Do you have any advice for me? What can I do for him?"

"Make his last hours happy â€" and let go of him, Hiccup."

My eyes widened and I tried to speak, but before I could say a word, she was gone.

My legs gave out, and the tears came. I collapsed onto Toothless' body. Taking a deep, gasping breath, I frantically started to search for a pulse. With a flood of relief, I felt the blood flickering under his scales. But then molten panic engulfed me again, when it stopped, only to start again with a shudder.

I inspected his wound. It was deep, and extremely near the heart. But not through the heart, I thought, grasping onto a weak lifeline of hope. I took off my coat and my shirt, and tried to stop the bleeding.

"Wake up, Toothless. You have to. Please."

... And the breaks are weird and the formatting is off because my computer is messed up right now! Adding more conflict when it hasn't even been properly established that the old conflict is all gone! What was I thinking? Who knows... :)

37. Chapter 36

****As told by Toothless****

****Chapter 37****

It was the first thing I heard after I had lost consciousness. An outward breath, then a roll of the tongue, then a stretching of the lips, then a hiss of air._ Please._ My ear flicked, and I opened one of my eyes a crack.

Hiccup was asking for me. Hiccup needed me.

I tried to jump to my feet, but then I felt extreme pain in my chest. Beside me, I heard Hiccup give a happy cry. He was beside me in an instant, pushing my head back down gently, shedding tears of joy onto my face. With a start, I realized that he was covered in blood. Then, with relief, I realized that it was not his own blood, but mine.

"Lie still, buddy, and I'll be back."

I obliged, and Hiccup left. He was back within minutes, with an armful of bandages, and some grass. I sniffed at the grass, then drew back. It had a horrible smell.

"These," Hiccup opened his hand more for me to see the grass better, "Are special plants that grow on this island. They'll sting, but they'll help you get better." He laid them on my wound. They felt like fire, the same roaring, dancing, tingling feeling, but this time, with a bite that my fire never had on my tongue. I hissed, but did not pull away.

For the next week, Hiccup was either at my side or busy doing something that absolutely couldn't wait. He never let anyone touch his cuts and bruises, even though they appeared to be quite serious, for all his attention was on me, or else the vital affairs of the tribe. He ate and slept at my side.

At the end of seven days, the healer carried Hiccup away while he was asleep, to tend to his wounds. But she brought him back quickly; Hiccup had completely healed already. A Night Fury's fire might have a harmful effect, but if a dragon licks your wounds, you will find them better in no time.

I often longed to go flying once more, but Hiccup told me again and again that I could not until I got better.

There were many things for my rider to do now that he was chief, but he was with me every spare moment he had. I learned that after his defeat of Kenna, her troops had surrendered, and Berk had been granted victory. Hiccup should have been happy when he told me that, but he never smiled now. He looked tense and worried all the time. Finally, after straining my ears to listen to one of his whispered conversations with Astrid, I learned what was wrong. I was dying, and there was little hope for my recovery.

One dark night, when the snow blew down along with a biting, howling wind, Hiccup came to my room.

He took one look at my chest, then knelt by me, despair etched deep in his brow. For a minute, he was still, except for the trembling of his shoulders as he silently wept. Then a word brushed his lips, so softly I barely caught the sound before it tumbled into infinity's fell grasp.

"Please."

Then he stood, and, still crying, walked out of the room.

I knew what I had to do.

38. Chapter 37

****Double upload cuz it was short and delayed... :)****

* * *

><p>As told by Hiccup

****Chapter 38****

If I still clung to hope after that night, it was extinguished in the morning.

I woke up to the sound of Astrid crying softly, and I knew.

I got up and dressed, but I didn't have the courage to go downstairs and face reality.

Astrid came in to me, face a little red from the tears.

I sat on the bed, and she sat beside me, hand on my arm. She started speaking in a low voice that trailed off frequently. She seemed to be trying to break the news to me gently, but I didn't hear the first few words. Then her voice broke through my haze of frozen disbelief.

"There was no pulse, Hiccup â€" his skin was as cold as ice â€" I'm so, so sorry."

I clenched my fists and leaned forward, crumpling in on myself, not wanting to believe anything.

My heart had withstood many fractures, but this broke it. How could he be dead? It was impossible, inconceivable, it couldn't be true!

Astrid put her arm around me. I stayed with my face in my hands.

She sighed, and put both her arms around me. I resisted the embrace for a second, then gave way and sobbed into her shoulder. But tears weren't enough, not at all.

_ Alone, alone! Alone! Without you, without me. If one of us goes on while the other stays. Alone._

A new wave of tears spilled from my eyes as I remembered Toothless' thought. It was real, now.

Life without him â€¦ how long would I have to live it? I had promised him I'd come soon after. But I couldn't betray my people and leave them here, on this cold and cruel earth. How long until I could let myself die of sorrow? Until another heir of my line could be foundâ€¦ but that could take years.

Astrid wiped a tear from my cheek, but many more followed it, streaming down my face like rain.

Then it felt like all my tumultuous emotions were slowly ebbing, draining away, swirling until they were no more, gone, leaving my body a husk, a shell, worthless. An ache, deep and strong as a bass note remained, though.

Astrid must've left me sometime, but I don't remember seeing her leave, only realizing numbly that she wasn't there. I stayed, sitting on the bed, staring at the wall, seeing nothing. I sat there, blind and deaf to aught but my grief, unable to feel anything but my anguish, and that deep, throbbing pain from inside, for hours, trapped and lost without him. It began to grow dark. I realized I was lying inert, without being able recollect having slumped from my sitting position.

Then my fingers twitched, and my aching eyes fluttered open, even though I didn't know I had closed them. Light was pouring in through an open window. Who had opened it? Why was it morning? Had I slept? Had it been a hundred nights or just one?

I stayed motionless, tears rolling down from my stinging eyes. My cheeks felt raw and sore, and a horrible taste was coating my mouth.

I rolled over and laid my face against the softness of my pillow, breathing in the smell of home, filling my lungs over and over. There was comfort in the rhythm.

I had depended on Toothless, and he had left me. I couldn't leave the people who depended on me. I couldn't abandon my tribe. I was their leader, their shepherd, the one who had to steer them through the storm.

It was a lonely job, now, and yet, one I was determined to do well.

"Goodbye," I whispered, and the word burned my throat. "I'll come as soon as I can."

* * *

><p>Don't kill me and stuff.

39. Chapter 38

As told by Astrid

Chapter 39

I stopped in front of Hiccup's door, and knocked softly. No answer.

He was probably sleeping again. I opened the door just a crack, and peered in. I saw Hiccup's slender form lying limply on his bed, his head resting on a tearstained pillow. From beneath the woven blankets I could see a small, bare foot. Beside it, though, his other leg ended suddenly. My heart twisted with pity. How much more could he go through?

He stirred slightly, and I sighed, wishing I didn't have to wake him. Goodness knows what horrible thoughts tortured him while he was awake, and his only refuge was sleep.

I crept to his side, and gently shook his shoulder.

"Hiccup?"

He shut his eyes tighter, and curled into a ball.

"Hiccup?"

"What?" His voice was muffled.

"The commanders of Berk want to speak with you. They have a lot of questions."

"I don't want to answer questions," He said, his voice still muted through his blankets.

I sighed. He had just lost his best friend, after all. Perhaps I should just leave him alone, and go downstairs without him. I turned to go, but a rustle behind me stopped me, and I turned to see Hiccup standing straight and tall.

"But that's not up to me, is it?" He asked.

I ran to him and threw my arms around him. He stumbled a little.

"I'm sorry," I said, drawing away.

He shook his head. "There's nothing to worry about."

I looked up into his face. It looked drawn and pale, and I could tell that he had been crying a great deal. His hair fell haphazardly to the side without the ring of gold to hold it back, but as I watched he picked up the circlet from the table where it had been lying and placed it on his head.

40. Chapter 39

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 40****

I was halfway down the hall, when I suddenly stopped. Astrid, beside me, stopped as well, and put a hand on my shoulder.

I closed my eyes. I heard a noise, but something was different about this sound. It was men speaking – the sound was faint, and I listened hard.

"The chief's still upstairs, bless him."

"He loved that dragon too much, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you. He's still a child, for goodness sake!"

The sound faded, and I rubbed my ears, even though I felt sure that the sound had nothing to do with them. I had heard it too clearly for it to me to just have been catching some voices from downstairs.

Memory stirred faintly in the back of my mind.

My heartbeat quickened. Could it be? Noâ€

"Astrid, did you just hear two men talking?"

She looked a bit scared. "No. Did â€" did you?"

I gave a nervous laugh. "Yes. It's happened before. But it's impossibleâ€" isn't it? Isn't he dead?"

"What?" She looked more then a little frightened now.

"Astrid, these voices, they're not random! They're Toothless, hearing things for me, picking up sounds that I couldn't hear and transferring them to me!"

"But Hiccup, he's â€"

"Dead, I know." But somehow I didn't believe it anymore. Words, unbidden, rose up from my memory to sing themselves to me again, my own thoughts â€" "Never underestimate a dragon."

"He's a Night Fury," I whispered.

"What?" She asked for the second time.

"He's a Night Fury!" I said again. "Why couldn't he, after all?"

"Couldn't he what?"

"Survive!"

"Hiccup, you saw the wound! You felt it in your own body, even! It was a clean sword stab right through the heart!"

"No, it wasn't, though! It was near the heart, but not through it! How do you think he survived for weeks?"

And without another word I turned and ran back to my room.

Lying open on my table was a worn, tattered old book â€" the book of dragons â€" but with a section on the Night Fury that I had written. I tore through it, skimming the pages on the subject of Toothless. His torn tail, his retractable fangs, his loyal character, his relentless devotion. And my mind began to work. Why had he died like that? After holding on so long â€" without saying goodbye? It wasn't

like him, was it?

Then I began to speed through the other pages on dragons. The Gronckle. The Terrible Terror. The Hideous Zippleback. Ahh, here. The numerous pages on dragon's behaviour. What they ate. How they flew. Their sleep patterns.

Then a sentence burst on me, its letters burned like fire in my mind's eye, and in glorious recognition, I laughed. I laughed from the bottom of my heart, a laugh teary with relief, yet strong.

I ran out of the room and down the hall, passing a confused Astrid on the way, and dashed down the stairs, taking them two at a time.

I knelt beside my dragon, and put a shaky hand in front of Toothless' face. For a heartbeat, tension coursed through me. I felt nothing, then a tiny tickle of air. He was still softly breathing.

Astrid came over to me, and put a hand around my shoulders. Tears ran down my cheeks again, but this time, they were tears of transcendent joy.

"Hiccup?" She asked.

I shook my head. "If " I whispered, hardly able to speak. "I told Kenna, so long ago. If a dragon is severely wounded, its best chance of recovery is to go into a Sleep Coma, in which it will heal itself. A dragon in this state may feel like it is dead. They will have no obvious pulse or heartbeat, and their chest will not rise or fall with breath." I took her hand, and held it in front of Toothless' nose.

"Toothless is in a Sleep Coma he's healing himself, not dying."

She laughed, and her eyes shone with joy. And then she threw her arms around me, and I put mine around her. "He's alive," I whispered.

She laughed and hugged me tighter.

* * *

><p>Double upload again :D So... are you still all going to hunt me down and kill me?

41. Chapter 40

****As told by Hiccup****

****Chapter 41****

And it was then that the dirty work began.

War leaves its burning mark on the land. It stains. It gets into the fabric of the world and is impossible to scrub away. It works its way into the mind, too. And when Toothless no longer preoccupied my thoughts, there was room for other images, other ideas in my mind. The sleepless nights I had spent while Toothless had been dying were gone, yes, but in their place nightmares such as I had never

known haunted me all through the night, so I would wake up shivering, screaming sometimes, always seeing Kenna's last moments, and feeling shame and anger that it was my fault.

I couldn't wait till Toothless was back. He always knew just how to soothe away a nightmare " but he was still sleeping.

And there were so many gruesome tasks to do as the chief of the village. Burying the dead, or sending them off in funeral ships. Visiting the injured, and comforting the families who had lost loved ones.

Two weeks after the battle, I was sitting alone on the edge of the village, staring out at the places fires still smouldered on the bloody plain where our battle had taken place, when Astrid came up behind me, and laid a hand on my shoulder. I looked up, hoping she'd sit down beside me and (more subconsciously) hoping somehow the conversation would get a touch romantic and she would bestow a kiss upon me and cheer me up slightly.

However, I had no such luck.

"I've got news on the general," she said in a low voice. I nodded, my insides going cold.

"Is he going to make it? What did the healer say?" I asked hopelessly, knowing from the look on her face that whatever news I was about to receive was going to be bad.

"He's dying," she said, and I heaved a deep sigh, and ran a hand over my face tiredly.

"And he wants to see you," she added.

"Okay," I said, getting up and sighing again.

"It's going to be alright, Hiccup," Astrid said, and hugged me comfortingly. I buried my face in her shoulder and closed my eyes, gathering my strength.

The moment I pushed open the door to the healer's house, I hated it. Hated it with an obsessive, burning loathing. When would I get away, get away from all this _death_?

The general was lying on the same bed Stoick had been laid on, and I approached it reluctantly " half afraid, and half shy. I never, never knew how to act around injured people. If I were in their place, I wouldn't want sympathy, not from people who didn't really mean what they said, not from people who didn't know what it was like to be on the brink of death.

Because I didn't. I didn't know. I hadn't been in a situation like this. Not when there is absolutely no chance you will escape, no chance you will recover.

"Hiccup" the voice was soft and raspy. The half-gurgle of a dying man. I suppressed a shudder, and came close beside the general's bed.

"I'm here."

"Listen to me," the man sighed.

"I'm listening." The words came out softly, and I swallowed hard. There was a slight lump in my throat - I hated to watch death conquering the living world.

"You passed."

"What?"

"You beat Stoick, actually," he said, and the chuckle he attempted turned into a nasty cough. "I don't know where you got all that talent. It wasn't from him."

I felt angry, and my eyes stung, as if with smoke. "Don't talk about my father like that."

"Hiccup," the general said, "I'm dying. If you won't hear the truth about your father, and yourself, from me, you won't hear it from anyone. Listen."

I leaned closer, shivering.

"You just beat Kenna Nadderslayer," he moaned, his sentence disjointed as he struggled to form coherent words. "I didn't expect you to."

"No one did," I said. "Least of all me."

"You are a worthy chief, if you can put your tribe before your life and come out of the fight victorious. Take my blessing," he whispered.

"Okay." It was all I could say. My throat had gone dry.

I knelt down, and the general put out a shaking, white hand and laid it on my hair.

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the third," he whispered, "May the road rise to meet youâ€¦ may the wind be always at your backâ€¦ the rain fall softâ€¦. soft upon your fieldsâ€¦"

I took a deep breath as he continued, willing myself not to cry. I knew what came next in this blessing.

"And until we meet againâ€¦"

I looked down. There would be no next time for this man.

"Stay safe, stay strong, stay brave, stay bold," he murmured.

"I will," I whispered.

And then he was gone.

**** BREAKâ€¦ the stupid site isn't working againâ€¦ ****

It was raining when I came outside, a dull, steady drizzle, and the cold cut into me, chilling me, reaching inside and making my stomach

crawl with icy shivers. I wrapped my arms around myself, and took a deep breath. My hair dripped, and drops of water ran into my eyes, as I crossed the village to my house.

The place had a damp feel to it, wet and cold, and I trudged up the stairs, eager to change into some dry clothes and slip into bed to think everything over.

When I pushed open the door to my room, I immediately sensed that I wasn't alone. I looked up, and my eyes found the giant green ones above me.

And then Toothless was purring, cuddling me and wrapping himself around me, and I, instead of being surprised or startled, instead of jumping back, simply let myself melt against him, closed my eyes, and let him purr me to sleep.

42. Chapter 41

****As told by Hiccup****

Chapter 42

I sat on a bench, leaning against the wall of a corridor within the great hall, watching the merriment inside the adjoining room. Toothless was outside, and I felt like should be with him, but Astrid was inside, and I wished I could be with her. Watching the dancing made me feel empty inside.

I used to be able to do that, I thought, and looked down at my feet â€" one real foot and one crude metal device in place of living flesh.

The music ended, and I turned away. I looked out, down the hall, to where the moon was visible through an open door, and sighed.

I was so wrapped up in my own thoughts that it wasn't until I felt the soft touch on my shoulder that I noticed that Astrid was sitting on the rough pine bench beside me.

I turned back around and smiled sadly at her. "I'd ask you to dance."

"I'd accept."

The music started again, and I nudged her. "You'll miss your dance, you better get back out there."

She shook her head. "I'm not going anywhere you can't go."

"You're being stupid. Wouldn't you rather be in there?"

Again, she shook her head stubbornly, and took my hand.

I stood. "Come on, Astrid. I know you really do want to be in there."

She remained sitting. "You're the only partner I'll ever dance with."

I sat back down, and took both her hands. I looked deep into her eyes, trying to figure her out.

"But then you'll never dance again," I said quietly, wondering if she meant it.

"I'd rather sit with you for a minute than dance for a year with anyone else," She whispered.

I was astounded by her loyalty.

"Come with me," I said, and pulled her to her feet.

We walked out of the hall, out into the breezy summer night, out onto the field behind it. The smell of food and the sound of songs wafted out into the darkness.

I swung myself onto Toothless, and he looked up at me. I smiled, and knew that he understood me as I held out my hand to Astrid. I knew he understood that no one, no matter how loyal, or beautiful, could ever replace him.

Astrid settled herself behind me. As we took off, she wrapped her arms around me, holding on.

As we flew over the sea, the moon's reflection keeping up with us easily, I felt like my heart would burst with happiness. Beneath me, behind me, before me, I was surrounded by love.

We didn't need to dance. We could do better.

We could fly.

****A/N:****

****Welllll " there you have it. That took me a year to write" and it looks like it still needs a ton of work. THANK YOU, EVERYONE for your support, comments, feedback, criticism, and just everything. I couldn't have asked for better readers.****

****I might might might do a sequel " I have about fifty pages of it written already, but I haven't touched it for months. Unfortunately for my writing projects, I just discovered an amazing TV show, and now Doctor Who dominates pretty much all my evenings. I've gotta do something about that, haha. Fortunately, though, on the fifteenth, there is another HTTYD short film thing coming out, and that might inspire me enough to finish the sequel.****

****I could post a snippet-teaser bit of the sequel on here if you want :)****

****Thanks again!****

End
file.